



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

CONRAD BAILEY,
Old, Rare & Fine Books,
P.O. Box 85, BLACK ROCK,
Victoria, Australia 3193

Paul's Wife: or "The Ostriches"

A Romance of the Awakening of Britain

Paul's Wife: or *"The Ostriches"*

A Romance of the Awakening of Britain

By Douglas Sladen, Author of "Fair Inez,"

"The Tragedy of the Pyramids," "Grace Lorraine,"

"His German Wife," "The Shadow of a Great Light,"

"The Douglas Romance," etc., etc. :: :: :: ::



LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.
PATERNOSTER ROW

Dedicated
IN REMEMBRANCE
TO
F.M. EARL ROBERTS, V.C.

CONTENTS

| CHAP. | PAGE |
|--|------|
| FOREWORD | vii |
| I.—INTRODUCING THE FAMILY OF ST. IVES | 9 |
| II.—ENTER PAUL WENTWORTH. | 13 |
| III.—AN "OSTRICH" RECEPTION | 19 |
| IV.—RUNNING PAUL WENTWORTH | 33 |
| V.—THE DUTIES OF A SOCIAL ADVISER | 47 |
| VI.—MEETING HIS MATCH. | 63 |
| VII.—IN THE ITALIAN DRAWING-ROOM. | 67 |
| VIII.—VICKY WENTWORTH | 70 |
| IX.—THE MEETING AT THE QUEEN'S HALL. | 74 |
| X.—ALONE IN HIS GLORY | 82 |
| XI.—BEARDING THE LIONESSE IN HER DEN | 85 |
| XII.—HOW RHODA TOOK HER COURAGE IN BOTH HANDS | 89 |
| XIII.—CONVALESCENCE | 95 |
| XIV.—UNIVERSAL SERVICE | 104 |
| XV.—RHODA MARKS TIME | 113 |
| XVI.—WHAT HAPPENED AT A SURREYSIDE ELECTION MEETING | 120 |
| XVII.—THE DINNER AT BARNES HOUSE | 134 |
| XVIII.—LADY LYONESSE PUTS HER FOOT DOWN | 136 |
| XIX.—MATTHEW PURDY, SPY | 146 |
| XX.—RHODA'S CAPTIVITY: LORD VANSTRY'S OFFER | 149 |
| XXI.—RHODA'S HEGIRA | 164 |
| XXII.—MARRIED IN SIGHT OF GOD | 173 |
| XXIII.—PAUL'S WIFE | 176 |
| XXIV.—LADY LYONESSE CALLS ON VIVIEN | 185 |

| CHAP. | PAGE |
|---|------|
| XXV.—WHAT THEY DID AT ROME . . . | 190 |
| XXVI.—WHAT THEY SAID AT HOME . . . | 203 |
| XXVII.—VICKY WENTWORTH'S ENGAGEMENT . . . | 208 |
| XXVIII.—VIVIEN DECLARES | 211 |
| XXIX.—A CONSERVATIVE PARTY | 214 |
| XXX.—THE WAGES OF SIN | 217 |
| XXXI.—PAUL RE-ENTERS THE ARENA | 222 |
| XXXII.—UNRELENTING | 227 |
| XXXIII.—HOW RHODA FOUND VIVIEN WITH PAUL | 231 |
| XXXIV.—VIVIEN'S CONFESSION | 234 |
| XXXV.—VICKY RELENTS | 247 |
| XXXVI.—THE TRIUMPH OF PAUL | 252 |

FOREWORD

WHEN the pre-war part of this book was written in the period just before the war, the "Ostriches" had driven thinking people to despair. That War was coming swiftly, any student of history could foresee; but our rulers were either burying their heads in the sand, like the traditional ostrich, so as not to see danger, or were sacrificing our Army and offering to sacrifice our Navy in the vain hope of propitiating Moloch.

If a patriot like Lord Roberts, who had seen the hurricanes of war, attempted to make the "Ostriches" raise their heads, they scratched up the ground furiously and tried to submerge him in dirt.

One day the hurricane burst, and we found ourselves in the greatest war in history, with "Ostriches" over our Generals. Even the "Ostriches" had realized by this time that they must take their heads out of the sand. They did what ostriches do when danger is actually upon them: they ran about beating the air with futile wings. It looked in the middle of the war as if the wild beasts would devour us while the "Ostriches" were impeding the hunters, until at last there came a man and chased the "Ostriches" away.

The latter part of the story was written in the early days of the Lloyd-Georgite revolution, when some of the "Ostriches" lifted up their heads and prepared to use the weapons of defence with which Nature had provided them. To these be all honour.

The War passed. The prayer in "Land of Hope and Glory," sung in so many assemblages of Britons in the opening days of the Great Ordeal,

"God who made thee mighty
Make thee mightier yet,"

had been answered. The Empire was safe and glorious.

In the General Election which followed, the Nation rose in its wrath and purged from the Mother of Parliaments the "Ostriches" who had so nearly extended to Britain the tragedy of Belgium.

DOUGLAS SLADEN.

*The Avenue House,
Richmond, Surrey.
January 1st, 1919.*

PAUL'S WIFE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING THE FAMILY OF ST. IVES

LORD LYONESSE was a new lord with old acres. As Sir John St. Ives he had been the greatest squire in all the West Country. From St. Ives Bay to the Land's End his estate stretched in one unbroken sweep. He had a vast mediæval castle frowning over the bay and a wonderful modern mansion on the promontory overlooking the reefs of the submerged Lyonesse, and he was the smelter and banker in the county town whose rents brought him much more than his acres.

He was a Liberal because he was a Cornishman, and he had been made a peer because he was a Liberal. It was the only reward which he could be given. He was too modest to accept Office, even if there had been no scramble for it. His services to the cause were incessant. He subscribed steadily to the Party Chest. He beat up recruits; he kept open house for them; and he fed lions in a princely fashion. *Punch* led the way in drawing-room puns when he was created a peer and chose for his title the Arthurian name of the submerged coast adjoining his estate.

Lady Lyonesse's *salon* was a watchword in Liberal circles, though she did her best to spoil its effect by never recognizing her husband's protégés, and priding herself on never asking her friends to her political receptions. But then she made no pretence of being a Liberal, being, in fact, the daughter of a Doomsday-Book Conservative, and very badly mannered.

PAUL'S WIFE

She steadily refused to gratify any rising Liberal's vanity by asking him to her social entertainments. There was no going in to the highways and hedges for the guests invited to them. Rhoda St. Ives, their only child, and heiress to the vast Lyonesse possessions, must make no mistake in choosing a husband.

Good as her dressmaker and her birth were, Lady Lyonesse looked like a cross cook. She had been a pretty woman, but she had spoilt her complexion with sport and her figure with greediness. Her husband adored her, in spite of her intractability. She was so sporting and she was so witty, though she exercised her wit upon her *receptions* for the amusement of her *parties*—which were strictly non-political.

Lord Lyonesse was equally popular at both. Goodness of heart gave him adorable manners. He had an instinct for gratifying his guests, whether they were small workers in the Cause, or the big fish of the Party, who were asked to meet the minnows. And he always acted upon it. No kindlier or juster man (according to his lights) lived in London.

Nature had clothed these pleasing qualities in an appropriate exterior. He had a commanding and elegant figure, a beautiful head with curly, silver hair and a face as good-looking as it was good-natured, whose chief charm lay in its eloquent hazel eyes. Feeling was his eloquence. He was so well-tailored and valeted that you took him for a *nouveau-riche*, though he had inherited his name and his acres from a Norman ancestor, a certain Riccardus de Sancta Ia, sent by Henry I. to hold West Cornwall against descents from Normandy by Duke Robert.

Lord Lyonesse had no son, but succession had been granted to his daughter Rhoda. He lived for Rhoda, and she was a rich reward. Tall and straight like her father, she inherited his captivating eyes and a type of beauty preferable in a woman. A rather florid type went well with his generous and affable nature. Rhoda's face had the charm of being haughty in repose, with its short, straight nose and beautiful proud mouth, but lighting up with a frank smile when she spoke.

INTRODUCING THE FAMILY OF ST. IVES

So far she had shown no signs of sharing her mother's disposition, and had given nothing but satisfaction to both parents, for while she charmed her father by the sympathy which she lavished on all the fish which came into his net as a Liberal host, she gratified her mother by her tact in keeping their relations impersonal. They represented politics and nothing but politics to Rhoda. She seemed to regard the receptions at Lyonesse House, at which she made such a dazzling hostess, as a man might regard going to the office. She kept her home life unaffected by it, and her mother said that she was such a good daughter.

Lord Lyonesse had a nephew by marriage who almost enjoyed the footing of a son, though he would never achieve the much more coveted position of son-in-law. Freddy Fenwick had little to recommend him except the distinction of his appearance. Lady Lyonesse, his own father's sister, despised him. But he made himself useful to her husband and showed his best side to Rhoda. Captain Fenwick—he had been in a famous Rifle Regiment for a few years before he found more congenial occupation on Lord Curzon's staff—was a beautiful person whose example decided how far the men in his set should follow the Stock Exchange in each departure in dress. As he made a dash for a tea-table at Ranelagh, the people who were already comfortably seated were conscious of an angel's visit. The angel had the glossiest of hats tilted back to just the fascinating angle, and reminded you of an opening bud in the fit of his morning-coat. His face wore the deep rose tan which fair men get from tropical soldiering and he had just reason to be proud of his teeth. But his bright blue eye was cold and hard; it was the eye of a man who would sacrifice his friends' interests or feelings with cynical selfishness; a man who was a slave to convention on the surface, but had no other sense of morality; a Lothario at heart, but correct to the verge of coldness in his ordinary relations with women, in spite of his charming and smiling manners. When he chose he could be almost irresistibly charming to them, and to his cousin he was drawn alike by love and by fortune-hunting.

PAUL'S WIFE

He had a gambler's intuition. He divined that to give her any intimation of his real feelings would result in instant dismissal, and he loved her so ardently that merely to be in her society was ecstasy to him. By pretending that he was without any feeling for her beyond cousinly affection he might enjoy little cousinly intimacies, and be with her almost as much as he pleased. For she was obsessed with getting up what are called 'functions' for the Liberal Party, and made Freddy, who was a cynical Conservative, her right hand. He had a good deal of his aunt's wit; and used to entertain Lady Lyonesse and his friends at the Marlborough Club by the hour with his experiences as a Liberal organizer. He also did his best to destroy the value of the meetings by warning each section—Old Liberals, Socialists, Irish Nationalists and mere Free Traders, that the others were intriguing against them, and making his uncle their catspaw—resulting sometimes in mutual distrust, sometimes in a rather free expression of opinions. Freddy blackguarded them all to each other, and thoroughly enjoyed himself, and thought of sending in a bill to the Conservative Association for services rendered.

From this he drifted into capturing new Liberal lions for his uncle's parties. Incidentally it gave him importance with the lions, if he could have persuaded himself that this was of the slightest value for anything but his amusement. The point was that it gratified Rhoda, whose keenness was extraordinary, and reconciled his uncle to having him in and out of the house all day long or by the week together.

One night Freddy had excelled himself so far that the lion was asked to dine with the family circle—highest honour of all—with a reception of small deer to follow. For he was no less a personage than the Right Honourable Paul Wentworth, ex-Premier of Australia, the great Paul Wentworth, whose eloquence during the Boer War had set all Australia aflame. And the family were awaiting their guest in the Gladstone study at Lyonesse House.

John Bull said that John St. Ives had been created Lord Lyonesse for boarding the G.O.M. The fact remained that the great man did make Lyonesse House

ENTER PAUL WENTWORTH

his headquarters in London for more than one season when he was out of office. And John St. Ives, with his ancient lineage and wide lands, was a perfectly fit personage to be raised to the peerage without giving a reason.

The Gladstone study was a sumptuous room which caught the morning sun and was fitted (by contract, *John Bull* said) with the books a statesman was most likely to require, and a bust of Cato—the younger Cato. The politicians whom Lord Lyonesse delighted to honour were always received in the Gladstone study.

This had its disadvantages when the occasion was a dinner, because the very sight of the room made Lady Lyonesse sulky. It was her inspiration to have the chip which Mr. Gladstone sent them when he felled Cromwell's oak, mounted in brass for a door-wedge, so that she could kick it. People who were "not in the know," used to wonder why a woman, who now moved awkwardly, so often crossed the room to put the door-wedge right. She did it to give vent to her feelings. The door-wedge and Freddy, who was responsible for the function, had come in for a good share of them this evening. But Freddy did not care. His heart was singing. For Rhoda's eyes were shining with sympathy for him, and Rhoda, with her perfect neck and shoulders displayed to their best advantage and her beauty dignified by the splendour of the diamonds in her sunny hair, would have graced a duchy—her mother's intention.

"Is he very awful, Freddy?" she asked in the interval between hearing the taxi drive up and the announcement:

"Mr. and *Miss* Wentworth."

CHAPTER II

ENTER PAUL WENTWORTH

PAUL had misgivings as he entered Lyonesse House—one of the detached palaces of Park Lane. He put it down to wicked wastefulness in one who posed as a champion of the poor. Its annual value would be prodigious; there were enough flunkeys in the hall for a

PAUL'S WIFE

guard of honour ; he wondered what it must cost in food alone for all these magnificent and disdainful creatures. He told himself that no private man had any right to live like Lord Lyonesse.

But it struck no awe into his soul. For nothing could be more grandiose than the entrance of the inflated stuccoed Government House at Melbourne, which he had traversed so often as an autocrat—an autocrat beloved of successive Governors.

“ Mr. and Miss Wentworth,” said the announcement, not “ Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth,” and a tall, straight man and an extremely pretty and well-dressed girl made their appearance just half a second later than you would have expected.

Paul had a way of entering a room with his chin a little in the air, and his eyes taking in everything with a cold, dignified stare. This did not represent haughtiness as much as preparedness. He was accustomed to all eyes being on him, and to having to speak as the ambassador of his country, though he was not Agent-General and had held no office in Australia since he handed in his resignation as Premier some years before. His six feet two inches and stiff, flat Colonial figure, gave him a commanding presence, and his fibrous hair and short bushman's beard, a beard bleached by the sun, went well with them and with his complexion—a mass of honest, friendly brown freckles. Lady Lyonesse noticed his freckles especially. She thought them underbred. She did not take any particular note of his eyes and mouth, which redeemed everything, the latter now so resolute, now so winning, the former, dark eyes, full of intelligence, which quickened in a moment to alertness or fire. With these two features, he swept his audience to enthusiasm or scorn. It was he who made Australia realize that she was a nation.

Lady Lyonesse was prepared to be snobbish. She did not like people who were careless of their personal appearance. It cost her a good deal of trouble to keep up to the mark herself, her tendency to stoutness being against it.

But he read her like an open book—she was not very subtle—and shook hands with her stiffly. That was the

ENTER PAUL WENTWORTH

way to Lady Lyonesse's heart. She was sick of the hail-fellow-well-met of the Liberal miscellany. Lady Lyonesse, spoilt great lady from her childhood, was not too gracious. She did not like Paul Wentworth's clothes ; the shoulders of his dress-coat were cut too square ; he had no white waistcoat ; his tie was ropy ; and, worst of all, the backs of his hands, as well as his face, had freckles—the large brown moons of freckles that suggest the sweat of labour in hot climates. Indifference to personal appearance vexed Lady Lyonesse, also, because it was such a common fault among the people Rhoda fussed over at their receptions ; she resented it at her dinner-table.

As for Miss Wentworth, Lady Lyonesse did not notice her prettiness, or the charm of her fair colouring, or her lithe Australian figure. All these were lost in the cardinal virtue of her not looking a crank. *She did not look a crank*—that was Lady Lyonesse's verdict, and it counted for much in her favour, because her hostess was so thoroughly bored with the cranks who pervaded what the *Daily News* called her *salons*. It did not lead, however, to any show of cordiality. Lady Lyonesse may have fallen into the habit of being rude to her guests, because they were so often unwelcome. She, at any rate, had the sincerity not to pretend that she liked people before she knew if she did like them.

Rhoda thought that her mother was hateful, and came forward, a spectacle of beauty which Paul would never forget until his dying day. She had all that makes a smile an act of grace—the firm chin, the proud mouth, the petulant upper lip and the perfect teeth, not too small. She put her whole soul into the smile of welcome with which she strove to repair her mother's rudeness.

Her father seconded her. His smile was never mechanical though it was automatic for every human being who addressed him. His mission in life was to make himself and his party popular. Paul read that at a glance, and after shaking hands with him, turned back to Rhoda. Something told him that he had found a new interest in life.

It was an odd thing that a man who had such a beautiful wife, and one who preserved her youth so marvellously,

PAUL'S WIFE

should have remained so essentially a bachelor. He was not an undomesticated man. He took his meals at home as often as his public duties allowed him ; he never went out in the evening from choice ; and, though it gave him pleasure, when he went to parties, to let his eyes rest on good-looking, well-turned-out women, he never seemed to think of one more than another afterwards. He was entirely taken up with his work. To his sister he talked a good deal, but nearly always "shop," and they had many almost silent meals when his mind was too engrossed to talk at all. If his wife addressed him he always answered pleasantly, and talked on until the subject was exhausted ; and on the rare occasions when he was not absorbed with his work, he would come in brimming with something in which she was interested, which she invariably received with the attitude of a parrot to whom a stranger is offering food. But, practically, in all his twenty years of public life in Australia he had been a hermit from Society, which accounted for the prodigious amount of work that he had accomplished.

He had entertained—he liked entertaining, but all his parties were for political purposes and given up to business. And so little are politics connected with social life in Australia, that few of his political associates knew his wife by sight, for she never appeared on a political occasion. Nor did they know Vicky more than perfunctorily, though she presided at her brother's functions and was enthusiastically interested in his career. She and his wife, Vivien, who led a gay life in the Society into which Vivien was born, entertained and were entertained by people, few of whom knew Paul more than superficially, though they would have welcomed him with Australian warmth if he had been so disposed. Australia abounds in pretty and spirited women, but none of them had turned their attention to the great Prime Minister as a man. Popular opinion believed him to be so obsessed with his beautiful wife that he passed every moment which he could snatch from politics in her society, whereas she studiously eschewed his company except at meals, being bored with his seriousness. They were, unfortunately, childless.

ENTER PAUL WENTWORTH

Paul was too simple to imagine that Rhoda thought of him as anything but the political guest of her father, yet he confessed to himself that he had not met anyone who, as a woman, pleased him so much. He was grateful for this new friendship at a leisure moment in politics. He exchanged but few words with her at dinner, though he sat between her mother and her. When he found that Lady Lyonesse was unwilling to be drawn into conversation, he addressed himself to her husband, who was sitting on her other side, as is customary in a party of six at a round table. Rhoda might have been rather left out of the conversation and so might Vicky, who was on Lord Lyonesse's left, if Freddy, who sat between them, had not skilfully drawn them into friendly conversation with each other across him. It suited his book best to smile at them and look at their prettiness, only putting in a word here and there. For he was at present, as he generally was, madly in love with his cousin, and on principle he was polite to a girl with money of her own so charming as Vicky Wentworth. "You never know what may turn up," was his motto; "keep all your powder, except your toothpowder, dry."

As Paul had to talk across Lady Lyonesse, he avoided subjects of prolonged conversation. Not one subject worth recording was touched upon, but the meal served its purpose of putting the party upon a sufficiently intimate footing before the reception began.

After dinner they went into the Italian drawing-room for coffee before they went down to the ball-room, where the reception in Paul's honour was to be held. The Quattrocento decorations and art treasures of the room, the Botticellis and Filippino Lippis on the walls, astonished and delighted Paul. He had never been in a private room with such things before. And expenditure of this kind did not come into his category of waste, because these were articles of permanent and, he understood, increasing value, and they were an education as well as a joy for ever. Rhoda saw his enthusiasm, and came up to share it.

"I suppose you know Italy well, Mr. Wentworth, as it's on the road to Australia?"

PAUL'S WIFE

"I wish I did. It's been the regret of my life that I never had the opportunity to travel."

"It's no good my asking you if you mean to when you retire—because politicians never do retire."

"They have to be retired," he said, laughing. "I shall, anyway. I suppose you know Italy awfully well, Miss St. Ives?"

"Oh, yes. I've been going there since I was a child. We had a villa at Fiesole—that's a kind of suburb of Florence—until Father began to take such an interest in politics, and we used to go there for part of nearly every year. That's how we got all the things in this room except the pictures. I love Italy. I always feel as if I'd been born there."

"Now tell me why. I've always felt that I should love it, though I don't suppose I shall ever get there, except on an overland journey passing through."

Rhoda felt inspired by her listener, and inspired him. Her beauty seemed to take on fresh tones, as her enthusiasm waxed. Paul felt a distinct disappointment when they were summoned to the reception, although it had been organized in his special honour.

"You must come back and look at the things some afternoon—to-morrow, if you like. Oh, no! to-morrow my Father wants to take you to Ranelagh to see the polo—are you disengaged to-morrow?"

Paul was disengaged, because he never went to tea-parties. He kept his afternoons free, taking Vicky to see the various events—chiefly sporting events—of the London season.

He promised to go to the polo with Lord St. Ives, and added: "I shall be delighted to come and look at these things some day next week if I may bring my sister. I give most of my afternoons to her."

"Why, of course, we shall be delighted to see your sister. Your wife is too great an invalid to go out much, I believe?"

"My wife can manage to go to a good many things, if she has not to engage herself beforehand, but can just go when the time comes, if she feels equal to it." Paul hated himself for having to be evasive.

AN "OSTRICH" RECEPTION

"I'm so glad. I was afraid that she was a very great invalid."

A vision of Vivien, with her iron constitution, the picture of health, rose before Paul's eyes. He could not help smiling.

"Megrimms!" he ejaculated.

"You're too hard on her. Men can't understand how delicate a woman can be."

Paul saw no use in pursuing the subject, and fortunately Rhoda had at that moment to deal with the skeleton in her own cupboard.

"You must excuse mother if she isn't at the reception," she said. "She simply won't do things unless she wants to."

After Rhoda's frankness, Paul was doubly vexed with himself for his evasion.

CHAPTER III

AN "OSTRICH" RECEPTION

THE receptions were held in the ball-room. Its buffet and smoking and card-rooms made it convenient for the purpose: most of the workers for the Cause smoked incessantly, whatever their sex, and many of them felt more comfortable when they were away from the *salon*, making a bar of the buffet with their own friends. When they were needed for introductions Freddy ferreted them out; he had the eye for a lube page for recognizing and finding people.

For the first half-hour the hosts stood at the door and shook hands with the crowd which streamed in, announced in stentorian tones. The Wentworths stood with Rhoda and Freddy a few yards away, and Rhoda introduced people to them, mentioning what each had done as a writer, lecturer, or wire-puller, or occasionally as a doer of good works for the poor. Paul said the appropriate thing to each with a sympathetic smile, but they mostly shook hands and hurried on to their coffee—the stimulant of fanatics. Only a few important people stayed in the ball-room; coffee was brought to them.

PAUL'S WIFE

Later on in the evening they became group-centres, when the rank and file flowed back like a tide and introduced friends to them. Matthew Purdy, of the Eighty Club, Sir Peto Goldstein, M.P., and his daughter, Luke Froy and Dr. Meek and their wives, were among the very few who stood on talking with the Wentworths.

Purdy was a little red-gilled man, with lips which worked hard all the time he was talking, and cold brown eyes behind glasses, whose rasping personality kept him out of Parliament. Purdy had written an article in the *Little Englander Review* to prove that the Liberals were more popular than the Conservatives in the Colonies, and wished to instruct Paul Wentworth on the point. He had read the Colonial Statesman's career in a dozen magazines and weeklies. He knew that Paul was one of the people, the son of a little shopkeeper, though he was the grandson of a brilliant briefless barrister, who had thrown up his profession to be a gold-digger, and thrown up that to be a "roustabout," a man of all work, who could not always find any work to do. He knew that Paul had won scholarships all the way up, from State School to Higher School, from Higher School to University, and, when he had taken his Law degree and been called to the Bar, how the Democrat Attorney-General, who was fascinated by the boy's meteoric career, had taken him into his chambers to devil for him, and found the experiment justified from the first. How young Wentworth's quickness and grasp in legal tangles had astonished the leader of the Melbourne Bar; how quickly Paul had sprung into a lucrative practice at the Bar under his fostering patronage, were matters of common knowledge. It was natural that a member of the Cabinet should try and secure so promising a recruit for Democrat—what we call Liberal—principles. A seat was found for Paul, whose rise in politics was as rapid as his rise at the Bar.

Thus far Purdy knew the outlines of his career pretty accurately; but he had not followed his later course in Australia particularly. The stars in their courses had fought for Paul. It did not take him long to weary of the childish prejudices which formed the only real division

AN "OSTRICH" RECEPTION

between the Democrat and the Constitutionalist in Captain Cook's Land politics. Fortunately he was not called upon to make any sacrifice of career or principles in escaping from them. The Democrats were forced into a coalition with the Constitutionalists by the frankly selfish and impracticable behaviour of the Irish Party, who voted for nothing on its merits, but simply as a lever to extract improper concessions from whichever great party in the State happened to be in power.

When once the Coalition was made, the Democrats, subject to certain compromises, became as constitutional as the Constitutionalists themselves, and the Opposition stole the clothes of the Democrats.

It was more than natural for a man so conscious of power, so full of enthusiasm and constructive ability as Paul Wentworth, to develop into an Imperialist when he was no longer restricted by Party disabilities. As an Imperialistic Premier of Captain Cook's Land he played a great part in the development of Australian Federation, and, though he was not the first Premier of Australia, he was unquestionably the greatest who had filled that position.

It was he who won back for Australia the position in the Empire which New Zealand, a single colony, had snatched from her, owing to the inferiority in grip of his predecessors compared to Mr. Seddon in New Zealand. And so great was his personal magnetism and influence that he might have boasted "Australia c'est moi" until a combination of self-interests gave the Labour Party their majority. And then, foreseeing a long period in which he would be doomed to inactivity by the permanence, though numerically it was not great, of the Labour Majority, he had determined to devote the rest of his life and career to politics in England.

And here he was.

"I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Wentworth," began Purdy, "because I have made a special study of the Colonies."

Paul received the great news with tactful appreciation. "Not more glad than I am to meet you. It has been the greatest blow to us in the Colonies that the

PAUL'S WIFE

Liberal Party has consistently ignored us, has not sought to know our wants, has seemingly not cared what became of us."

"A mistake, my dear sir, an entire misconception of facts. But a natural mistake, perhaps, because our opponents go about claiming a monopoly in the Colonies. If we don't go round disputing about tariffs and armies and fleets, you must not think that we are forgetting or ignoring you. These things only obscure the imperial vision; they are gross, self-seeking, time-serving."

"In what have you specially interested yourself in the Colonies?" asked Paul, hastily changing the subject. "Irrigation or mining, or our land-system, or reciprocity, or . . . ?"

"These are merely local interests," said Mr. Purdy loftily. "I have concerned myself chiefly with the part which the Dominions overseas are to play in the regeneration of . . ."

"The Empire," put in Paul, with a touch of enthusiasm coming back into his voice.

"No, not the *Empire*, that is so narrow—the *world*."

"Oh, well, the world's all right. I suppose it includes the Empire. And we have led the way in land-transfer, old-age pensions, woman's suffrage, and a few other little things."

A black look flitted across Purdy's face as woman's suffrage was mentioned, but he recovered himself and proceeded.

"You will acknowledge, I suppose, that the Free Dominions view with suspicion and distrust everything which seems to threaten their autonomy?"

"Quite. You had a lesson of that the other day, when you nearly drove Natal into revolt by interfering with their settlement of the Zulu question."

"But that was an outrage upon humanity. We spoke for the whole civilized world."

"A very risky proceeding. The Colonies have no desire to have their affairs managed by the whole civilized world, not if every man in it was a philanthropist. We have just agreed that they are dead against everything which threatens their autonomy."

AN "OSTRICH" RECEPTION

"But you would not apply this feeling to a case like this?"

"They would," said Paul, rather grimly.

"Oh, well, we'll waive that instance, as feeling ran so high. It is not the policy of the Liberals to coerce. We give with both hands, making no conditions, but only trusting that others will be as generous to us."

"Well, you've had great luck in that way. Your giving back to the Boers everything that you fought the war for, seems to be turning out fairly well, thanks to Botha, a level-headed man who sees that it is no good their exciting themselves, since you are prepared to give everything away. But the Australians couldn't have done it; the blood of their sons slain by those very Boers smells too fresh."

"We did not approve of the war," said Purdy, thinking that he was making a point.

"Good Lord! You don't mean to say that you gave the show away just to spite the Conservatives?"

"Certainly not. We did it to show our disapproval of their policy."

"Hum!" said Paul.

"But we are wandering from the point," continued Purdy cheerfully. "I was telling you how we rely on the Overseas Dominions to help us in the regeneration of the world."

"Well, it's only right that the Colonies should tell the civilized world how to manage its affairs, if it's going to tell them what they are to do in every matter that turns up."

"I'm serious." There was a note of pain, entreaty, or something of the kind in Purdy's voice, which persuaded Paul to give him his head.

"Quite so. You were saying . . . ?"

"We look upon the Dominions chiefly in two ways—as a magnificent field for social experiments and to help us to guide the subject peoples on the road to self-government."

"Who is going to play the social experiments—you or we?"

"Oh, you, of course. We have always considered

PAUL'S WIFE

the welfare of the poorest alien in the East End of London before the richest mine-owner in the Transvaal."

"Don't let us speak of aliens—these East End protégés of yours are ten times worse than our Chinamen. And we don't have them in Australia at any price."

"We wouldn't allow the Chinese in the Transvaal," said Purdy, with conscious virtue.

"I'm afraid that was to mark your disapproval of the Conservatives."

"They were deserving of the strongest reprobation," replied Purdy, with unruffled self-complacency.

"Then I may take it that you are completely at one with us in our Legislation against 'yellow immigration'?"

"I have not studied your immigration laws sufficiently to justify me in answering off-hand, but, speaking generally, you should not encourage your people to arm themselves to the teeth and call out answering passions in Eastern multitudes."

"Well, how is it to be managed?"

"The Liberals have always been able to find the Middle Way. Their faith in peace and their trust in mankind enables them to deal sympathetically with alien races, and by frank and generous treatment to banish mutual suspicion and distrust," replied Purdy sententiously.

"I am afraid that they won't get the chance in Australia."

"The Colonies can help us if we cannot help them," rejoined Purdy hopefully. "With Colonial support the Liberals will still be able to change the basis of Indian and Egyptian government and to keep the peace until the experiment is made."

It was on the tip of Paul's tongue to retort, "I hope to God they won't!" but he restrained himself, to let the little bull-frog expand. Purdy flowed on.

"You will allow that the average Colonial would still prefer to entrust his rights and his independence to the keeping of Liberals?"

"Are you referring to such matters as possible aggression by Germany?"

"Not particularly."

AN "OSTRICH" RECEPTION

Paul's smile meant, "I should think not!" but it was interpreted more sympathetically, so it had the effect of a cold douche when, after going over the matter in his head, he declared, "As far as my experience goes, I have always found the Colonial Office much more difficult to deal with when the Liberals are in power."

"The Liberals have duties which they owe to humanity," said Purdy loftily, as if the Colonies were trespassers in that preserve of the Reformer.

"I find it difficult to understand what section of humanity is benefited by their opposition to trade-preference when every important country except England is in favour of preference in some form or another."

"It is from mere ignorance of what is good for them, and we should not encourage them in it. We know that preference would endanger British shipping and British foreign trade."

"German shipping and German trade have been built on it."

"And would cause contraction, not expansion, in Colonial trade, and would disturb the present harmony within the Empire."

"Do you really mean to tell me that it would cause contraction, not expansion, in Colonial trade with Great Britain if you bought all your wheat from Canada and Australia and they left off buying manufactured articles from Germany and the United States?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But how can you prove it?"

"It needs no proof."

"I suppose you would prove it in the same way as you prove that harmony between the Mother Country and her Colonies is promoted by your banging and bolting the door in our faces when we ask for reciprocity in trade?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I suppose you do admit that German and American trade have been growing much faster than your own?"

"In a way."

"And do you deny that if British exporters were

given a substantial preference over foreigners by Colonial importers that British trade with the Colonies would increase ? ”

“ Preference is intolerable in this enlightened age. It is not preference that we need, but an improvement in our trade-policy.”

“ You are not suggesting that you have never tried to make any improvements in this direction in the decades in which your trade has been slipping away ? ”

“ Well, not so much as we might have done, perhaps. We have had things so much our own way, you see.”

“ I am very interested in this idea of yours, for if it really is practical, it will be a tremendous boon to the Colonies as well as the Mother Country, for I am convinced that the continuance of the Empire depends on its commercial unity.”

“ I won't allow that.”

Paul smiled again. Then he said, “ You were going to tell me the improvements in Britain's trade-policy which will obviate any need for preference.”

“ We might lower the cable and freight rates.”

“ Discriminating against the foreigner ? ”

“ No, to everyone.”

“ Then how will it be in favour of British trade ? ”

“ We don't want such a discrimination.”

“ Then I don't see how it will help. But go on.”

“ We might appoint more trade-agents in the Colonies.”

“ But who will pay for them ? ”

“ The exporter.”

“ But every sane exporter pays as many travellers as he can afford now.”

“ He needs education himself.”

“ Doubtless he does, but nothing educates an exporter so much as being sure of a market for his new ideas.”

“ And we must found central bureaux for the dissemination of commercial intelligence and to prepare statistics.”

“ Excellent, this last. Germany has been building up a trade on it for many years. But the prime necessity is to be sure of a market, and to be sure of a market you must have equal rights with other competitors, and I

AN "OSTRICH" RECEPTION

know of no other way of achieving this than by Preference, and the power of bargaining which Preference confers."

"I would rather England did without trade than owe it to Preference."

"But how could England do without trade?" asked Paul indignantly.

Here Rhoda, who had been listening with great interest to the dialogue, deemed that it was time for her to interfere. She could perceive that Purdy, to use a homely metaphor, was trying to teach his grandmother to suck eggs.

"But you are a Liberal, aren't you?" she said to Paul, turning the full power of her beauty and enthusiasm on him.

"Everyone in Australia is a Liberal," he said gallantly. "There is no people so impatient of dead forms and phrases."

Rhoda was greatly relieved. The idea that any form or phrase to which Liberals cling should be dead was simply inconceivable to her. Freddy Fenwick said that she believed that Free Trade only had to lower its net to bring up a miraculous draught of loaves and fishes. Having received this assurance, she was far too tactful to risk wearying Paul with another long political discussion. She began again:

"We were so sorry your wife could not come," as if it was entirely a new idea.

Paul solemnly repeated the formula he had administered already. "Her complaint is a purely nervous one."

"It must be a great inconvenience to you."

"Oh, no. My wife naturally cannot accept a dinner invitation with this uncertainty hanging over it, so my sister goes out to dinners with me. But where it is a reception at which the presence of one more or less does not signify, my wife goes if she feels equal to it."

"Well, I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing her in this way. We always receive every Sunday night."

Paul tried to picture his wife at a Liberal reception, full of the very types for which she had the rudest contempt, earnest people, careless of their appearance;

PAUL'S WIFE

agitator people, careless of their manners; freaks with fads which they ran to death; and the good and simple people who formed the audience for all these amateur theatricals. Mrs. Wentworth was, at any rate, thorough. She hated bores, and made not the slightest effort to conceal this unfortunate state of affairs. This attitude had been of assistance to him in his political career, for it had prevented her from going to assemblages where she certainly would have injured him vitally by her wicked rudeness.

"How pretty your sister is! You can see that she will retain her adorable freshness when she grows up to be a woman."

He looked at Vicky proudly. The freshness of her colour was extraordinary; the white of her teeth, the blue of her eyes, the pink of her admirably freckled cheeks, the gold of her hair, were all so vivid.

"Now, how old do you think Victoria is?"

"I suppose she is twenty-two from the way she does things. But she does not look anything like that—not more than twenty at the outside."

"You're ten years out—Vicky's thirty."

"Why, she's five years older than me, and she looks a child! But perhaps she's done nothing but dance and play golf and tennis, like so many Australian girls. That in a climate like yours might give her immortal youth."

"She has certainly had her share of dancing and sport, but she's kept my house for me."

"And that must have been very trying, with the uncertainty about your wife."

Paul looked at her quizzically. She seemed to be speaking in perfect good faith, so he said, "Very trying. And before that she was governess and housekeeper in the family of one of our richest men, Mr. 'Money' Moreton, where she had to do all the entertaining, because Mrs. Moreton had been a washerwoman before her husband made his pile, and remained a washerwoman in every way, except in the pursuit of her useful calling."

"But why had she to go out as a governess when you are so rich, Mr. Wentworth? I wonder you allowed

AN "OSTRICH" RECEPTION

it!" said Rhoda, who had the courage of her opinions, and saw no inconsistency in belauding the dignity of labour to artisan politicians, while she looked down upon a governess.

"I wasn't rich in those days—that was before the land boom. Besides, what's wrong with the profession of governess, or the profession of housekeeper? They're as good as any other, when you're another man's employee, working for wages."

"Well, I didn't mean that. . . ." Rhoda was used to making apologies for wounding susceptibilities; the Labour guests took offence at such extraordinary things.

"We thought it a rise when she got it," said Paul relentlessly. "Our father belonged to the artisan class, which is proud of seeing its sons clerks and its daughters governesses. My father would have made me a clerk if he had lived, I'm sure."

"Oh, stop, stop, stop!" cried Rhoda. "I know I've said the wrong thing again, but you needn't rub it in!"

Paul laughed, a good-natured, contagious laugh. "I was only teasing you, Miss St. Ives. We Liberal politicians have some very arduous conventions to observe. How you must envy the Conservatives!"

"Why?"

"Because they have so much less pretending to do."

"I'm afraid that you're not a very good Liberal, Mr. Wentworth."

"No man is who dares to think for himself. The doctrine of infallibility is killing Liberalism, as it is killing the Roman Catholic Church. They appeal to the same class of mind."

"What rank heresy!"

"Heretic is only another name for a reformer."

"I suppose it is, but our heretics have a bad habit of going over to the Conservatives."

"We have reformed Liberalism in the Colonies, and we have swallowed the Conservatives. There are only two classes of politicians there—Liberals and Labour. In England I think the Conservatives will swallow the Liberals, but it comes to the same thing. In all countries the day is approaching when there will only be two

PAUL'S WIFE

parties—Labour and Anti-Labour, or, at any rate, Socialists and Anti-Socialists.”

“Is not that another way of saying Liberal and Conservative?”

“Not at all. While the Liberals have been bathing—mostly beyond their depth—the Conservatives have stolen their clothes. There is no Conservative Party now; it is only an agglomeration of independent Liberals, with whom some survivors of the Stone Age act very unwillingly.”

“At this rate, you can make out anything to be anything. Now let me hear your travesty of the Labour Party.”

“Some of their leaders are excellent men, but their influence declines in proportion to their excellence. As a party they stand for all that is bad in politics.”

“Ah, you're prejudiced!”

“My dear young lady, remember that we have a Labour majority and a Labour Cabinet in Australia, blessings which you have not enjoyed in England, so far, and that I have retired from Australian politics until Labour has had enough rope to hang itself, and allow us to begin the work of true Liberalism afresh.”

“Why is the Labour Party so mischievous?”

“Because destruction, not construction, is its motto; because it is forever seeking to kill the golden goose, to break up the funds which keep industrial enterprises growing, to tax enterprises out of existence, instead of enticing money into investments.”

“But the labourer is worthy of his hire.”

“Certainly. I should like to see money which is invested in commercial enterprises exempt from ordinary taxation, and the balance of profits, after setting aside three per cent. for the use of the capital, divided equally between the labourer, the State and the capitalist.”

“That's daring enough for any visionary.”

“Not for the Labour Party. It would not be too daring for them to abolish the rights of capital altogether; they would not foresee that the result in a few years' time would be to reduce every artisan and shopkeeper to the condition of the village cobbler and the village sweet-shop, working

AN "OSTRICH" RECEPTION

on their own inadequate means in an insignificant way. But that is looking ahead. Speaking of immediate results, when a Labour party are in power, they are careless of the most ordinary rules of finance in their budgets, and cannot be brought to interest themselves at all seriously in national or international questions. They are pre-occupied with Class Legislation. They are too prone to tax existing interests to provide the payment for unprofitable public works undertaken for political reasons. Except young Hughes, I have yet to meet in Australia the Labour statesman who shows or wishes to show any real statesmanship. He has shown real grit in his opposition to strikes and syndicalism. But his projects are so immense, his reforms so sweeping, that I am waiting to see if the Commonwealth can bear the strain. In the interval, I wish to give him a fair chance of showing what a sane Labour leader can do, and this I propose to effect by transferring myself to British politics."

"You'll give me the blues, Mr. Wentworth !"

"I wish I could give our Party the blues, and make them see how they are laying their bed between the upper and the lower millstones."

Rhoda disapproved of his sentiments strongly. She had no wish to be awakened from her dream of Liberal infallibility. Ever since she had taken part in the entertainments and propaganda of Lyonesse House she had lived in a political paradise unshadowed by any clouds, except those which arose from the manners of the infallible, and here there came along what she called a man of wide experience and the highest eminence, who said bluffly that the tail was wagging the dog, and that no tail was fit to govern, though the numerical superiority of its admirers put it in power. He made out her political paradise to be another kind of paradise, and was altogether disconcerting.

That she bore him no ill-will for it was manifest, for *à propos* of nothing, she asked impulsively, "Can't I do anything for your wife ?"

His gratitude was obvious, though he had to say, "That depends on whether she likes you or not. She's very definite about her likes and dislikes."

PAUL'S WIFE

Rhoda began to wonder if jealousy had anything to do with Mrs. Wentworth's variableness. Already she was acknowledging to herself the force of Paul's personality. His simplicity and enthusiasm set off his clearness of vision, his directness in asserting his convictions, his magnetic patriotism. Pettiness found no place in Paul Wentworth. He was a lever, not a rock. She saw in him none of the usual graces with which men lay siege to women. He forgot to offer the attentions for which occasion arose. Such occasions generally caught him napping. Though no one could have been further from ungraciousness, he made no little polite speeches; he was self-centred to the verge of selfishness. But he was a happy-hearted man, who did everything with a will. He was an inspiring man to share a task, a leader to whom one would instinctively turn in trouble or danger, a man not unduly sanguine, but never down-hearted; a man who could say "no" very decisively, but could not be churlish; as strenuous and willing as a race-horse.

As a politician's daughter and a tireless worker in politics, she could not help cherishing a profound admiration for the man who had been Prime Minister and Dictator undisputed of the Democracy which is conterminous with a Continent. Both as politician and woman she could not but feel mightily attracted by a politician whose sincerity stood so sharply in contrast with the cult of the British Liberal statesmen among whom she had been brought up. She saw now that it was a cult—that there was a cult of the Liberals and a cult of the Conservatives. Liberals and Conservatives were professors of one or other of these cults. Both were incapable of divesting a policy of its traditions, and saying, "Is it sound in itself?" though they were ready enough to pronounce anything right or wrong—that is, right or wrong according to party shibboleths.

But Paul Wentworth declared his mind like a judge. He summed up evidence and gave the soundest decision of which he was capable. And this he had always done, from the moment that his voice was heard in politics. Australia, fortunately for him, had stood in need of the sincere opinions of individuals. It was sincerity which

RUNNING PAUL WENTWORTH

had made him first of all Prime Minister of Captain Cook's Land and eventually Prime Minister of Australia.

And now Australia also was no longer in the Golden Age of Sincerity. That had been succeeded by an age in which the circumvention of the Labour Party was the prime necessity, and Paul Wentworth had gone home to England to try and get a hearing for sincerity in the Mother of Parliaments.

CHAPTER IV

RUNNING PAUL WENTWORTH

RHODA ST. IVES was running Paul Wentworth. That was a matter of common hearsay. Society did not comment much on the fact that she was running him; they only wanted to know why.

There was more than one conclusive *why*. He was so well worth running, for the pleasure of association with one so great, and he needed guidance to prevent his drifting into free-lance-hood.

Rhoda and her father worked with fine combination when they were running a politician. She did not take the false step of pressing him with invitations from a woman—who happened to be a young and very pretty woman, with immense expectations. The invitations came from her father, generally with no mention of Rhoda. But Lord Lyonesse, with all his charm of manner, was rather a bore. "Take some more champagne," was the most interesting thing he ever said—and he said it every day to someone. His idea of politics was to give parties to and for the Liberal party. He knew the leaders of the party so intimately that he was in a position to address any one of them by their surnames without a prefix, and many of them by their Christian names. There were few of them who were not attached to him for his genuine good qualities; but their real feeling about him was reflected in the bitter gibe of *John Bull*—in its unauthorized life of him—that he was "the Lyonesse who performed the duties of Lyons—J. Lyons and Co. Ltd." In its account of a great Liberal function held at his house,

PAUL'S WIFE

"the catering," it said, "as usual, was carried out by J. Lyonesse and Co., Unlimited."

As Lord Lyonesse had comparatively little to say, away from his dinner-table, he took Rhoda with him whenever he could, if he was running a political celebrity. He knew so many people wherever he went that he could always get entangled in a conversation, which left the celebrity exposed to the fires of Rhoda. It needed a strong man not to succumb to those fires. A beautiful and sincere woman was using all her powers of pleasing as a woman, and all her powers as a *rusée* politician. She could amuse, she could argue, and above all, she could listen. She knew most eminent people by sight, and was fairly well-up in the points of ordinary games, if information was needed; she was perfectly charming as a woman and perfectly dressed—exactly the woman whose company a man would choose for watching a polo match at Ranelagh, or taking on his drag to the Eton and Harrow Cricket Match. And all the time she was a first-rate political agent, with her eye fixed on the main chance.

She counted for much in politics. She was very able; she studied them most earnestly under the tutelage of the leaders of her party, and she had the immense advantage of believing her beliefs profoundly. She pleaded with a passionate sincerity and won conviction for theories which were demonstrably absurd—as only a woman can.

On the next afternoon, it was a Saturday early in June, Paul motored down to Ranelagh with Rhoda and her father. Polo was in progress on one side of the Beverley Brook and an aeroplane was reporting progress on the other. Paul was attracted to the aeroplane. He believed that the navigation of the air would change the conditions of travel and transport, perhaps also of war, as much as the invention of railways, so he welcomed every opportunity of studying their development.

Lord Lyonesse, as a political host and prodigal entertainer, spent a good deal of his life in being shown round by directors. Even at Ranelagh, which had three kings among its members, and the Lord Chief Justice an habitué at its golf-links, a personage came forward to show him round. He took care not to find his way back to Rhoda

RUNNING PAUL WENTWORTH

and Paul. He was a shrewd canvasser, if he was not a great politician. He saw the necessity for a little proselytizing and for this Rhoda must have a free hand.

But Rhoda was a failure to-day. She had in truth met her master. She had not often experienced any difficulty in turning the conversation into the requisite channel. Politicians are as ready as authors to talk "shop." But in Paul Wentworth she was talking to a man who had risen to be Prime Minister of two great Democratic communities by the sheer force of his personality. In Parliament he was notorious for his firmness in refusing to be drawn before he had formed his opinions; and he wanted to observe for himself why the Liberals of England were out of touch with Colonial Liberals.

Also—unlike the best people—he was interested in what he had come to see, and he showed where he was interested by a steady fire of questions. Rhoda was kept busy answering. Finding him very irresponsive when she assaulted him with the bland self-congratulations of Matthew Purdy's fool's paradise, she tried a fresh line of blandishments.

"This place ought to please you—you Australians are such devotees of sport."

"We are and we aren't. We support it prodigally with our money; we make holidays of the big races and big matches in Melbourne and Sydney; we produce very fine cricketers and from time to time a very fine sculler or boxer. But our cricketers, though they are called amateurs, and mostly hold some clerk's position, which is kept warm for them when they are attending to the serious duty of their lives, are practically professionals—the most highly-paid professional cricketers in the world, and they are entirely the product of the various State capitals, such as Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane. Australia has no country cricketers worthy of the name. The bushman does not play cricket or anything else—he shoots very little; he prefers not to ride. I never knew a bushman yet who would get on a horse in preference to getting into a buggy."

"But I thought that the bushman was the typical sportsman."

PAUL'S WIFE

"He is a sportsman who has nothing to do with sport. He is far too busy for that; he does not require it; he gets more exercise than he needs without it. There is so much to occupy him in all the hours that human endurance will allow him to remain in the saddle—bush-fires, lost sheep, aborigines, if he is far enough North. You could not meet a finer fellow than the true bushman, but he does mighty little playing."

"Sport seems to be full of contradictions. Here in England it is the Conservatives who rail against the tyranny of sport and proclaim from the housetops that the country is going to the dogs while the young men—the working men in particular, because their behaviour is most under discussion—are betting on horse-racing and going to see football matches. It is Kipling, the Conservative Cassandra, who sets the example of talking about *muddled oafs and flanneled fools*. But the sporting man whom they seek to abolish is generally a flaming Conservative. Do you have the same outcry in Australia?"

"It would have no meaning there, because everybody in Australia has a business, and only plays when business hours are over."

"That isn't exactly the point, is it? The question is, do your people neglect their duties as citizens, owing to their preoccupation with sport?—Or, to speak more correctly still, with sporting tips and results?"

"There is no fear of that in Australia. Our people are born politicians. They all read Liberal and yet more Liberal papers, and argue about them, and vote nearly full strength."

"What an excellent thing! That is the ideal state of things."

"Everyone who does not exercise his vote should lose it."

"Well, what do you think of the harm done by sport in England—do you agree with the hysterical Kipling?"

"I don't think I've had sufficient opportunities to judge. It seems rather too much identified with betting among all classes. The lower classes are accused of regarding it only from this standpoint. I can't say if this is true. But your country gentlemen who spend

RUNNING PAUL WENTWORTH

so much of their time on sport, seem to spend the rest of it rather well. They look after their estates personally, voluntarily perform certain public duties and are thoroughly interested in politics."

"But only from their own selfish point of view."

"That's the only way anyone regards anything, unless he is too rich to care. But, Miss St. Ives, don't let's talk politics—I want to ask questions about Ranelagh and the polo men and the aeronauts."

For a moment the colour mounted in her clear cheeks as she recognized defeat, but she was soon reconciled to the situation by the animated interest of his questions, and the obvious pleasure he took in her society without once alluding to it. He talked and behaved like an A List friend, not a B List acquaintance. The names of the people who were invited to Lyonesse House were kept in two books marked A and B. A was used for Lady Lyonesse's parties, and B for the political receptions.

Now, Paul was very much a B List person. Lady Lyonesse had protested against asking him to dinner, and, moreover, he was married, so he ought to have kept his distance, disguised by as much palaver and laughing as he pleased; Rhoda was accustomed to artificial intimacies for political effect. But Paul was nothing if not sincere, and in Australia the favour of intimacy came from his side. He was the greatest person in the country. So he conferred the favour of intimacy upon her, as if it was *his* right, and not *hers*, to decide the degree. And it was all done so masterfully, in a manner so free from offence, that Rhoda just surrendered to the situation, and put him on the A List in her heart, and wandered up and down the polo ground, where the aeroplanes were, gay and sparkling with innocent coquetry. They passed her father often, without noticing him, but he noticed them, and thought that Rhoda was excelling herself as a Liberal spider.

Finally, the airship was run out of its shed by a score of willing arms, sputtered and protested for many minutes, and then suddenly took a run, like a wide jumper at the 'Varsity Sports, and leapt into the air, and soon flew out of sight, buzzing like an angry mosquito.

PAUL'S WIFE

“Quick!” cried Rhoda. “We must tear across and get chairs for the Old Etonians Polo Match, or they’ll all be snapped up!”

There was a sort of sack race of women in hobble skirts—too many to make your way through. When Rhoda and Paul did get through at last, every chair was taken.

“Let’s try the polo pavilion, to see if we shall have any better luck there.”

They toiled round the polo ground, and were nearly run over by a rush for goal, and when they got to the pavilion, found all the seats gone there too. The low rail in front of the polo pavilion, to prevent players riding over the path, looked tempting to tired limbs. Four or five men, who had been playing in the last match, to judge by their brown riding-boots, stained with their ponies’ sweat, and long over-coats and mufflers, were sitting on it already, probably playing the game over again, like golfers.

“That’s good enough for me,” said Rhoda, seating herself towards the far end from the polo men. She noted the characteristic way in which Paul planted his feet out. He sat down like a batsman waiting for his innings, strung and keen, though he was only going to watch a polo match. The players were coming out on their ponies now, some tailing in side by side, laughing and talking, one or two taking a preliminary gallop, slogging a ball in front of them. Then the game began, and he had no eyes for anything else.

His obsession was another’s opportunity. He did not enter into Freddy’s calculations as a rival; his age and appearance made it impossible, and Freddy was accustomed to Rhoda taking up new lions with feverish interest. But it interfered with his pleasure to be deprived of the society which was part of his daily bread, and it was his custom to hang about incidentally, on the chance of the lion’s being suddenly abstracted. Freddy was wise in his generation; he made no attempt to take possession of Rhoda; he merely sat down beside her with exactly the right degree of familiarity in the lift of his hat, as if he took it for granted that she was absorbed in conversation with Paul. Which she was not, because

RUNNING PAUL WENTWORTH

Paul's direct questions about the game and the players only needed monosyllabic answers.

"Which is R. Grenfell?"

"Here."

"There isn't any off-side this year, is there?"

"No."

Freddy soon won the right to talk. There were plenty of people to talk about—acquaintances, daring in their companionships and their costumes. Paul was conscious of a feeling new to him. He did not want to make conversation with Rhoda; he was intent on the game; but he confessed to himself that he wanted to monopolize her. He would rather that she should not be conversing so animatedly with Freddy, and all the more because it was natural for a girl like her to have a young, well-bred, well turned-out young man cavaliering her.

How was he to know that she was only playing out time with Freddy, until he was ready to be taken in hand again? He did not feel angry or jealous; he just felt a little disturbed inside.

While they were sitting there playing at oblique purposes like this, something made Rhoda look up. She saw a woman standing by Paul, with her hand on his shoulder familiarly, the most distinctive woman whom she had seen at Ranelagh that day, dressed with daring but taste and success, very elegant, quite beautiful, with deep red hair and red-brown eyes setting off the extraordinary brilliance of her complexion. Such red irises she had never seen in anyone's eyes. They were beautiful eyes, if eyes can be beautiful which seem incapable of any sympathy but the sympathy of passion, and nobody could look at them without being arrested by their extraordinariness. At the present moment they were only laughing, but it was not a pleasant laugh; it was suggestive of malicious amusement.

"Fancy my seeing you here, Paul!" said a voice, clear as a bell, with a bell's metallic ring. "You seem as much at home as if you were in Australia."

"Do I? It is far from what I feel."

In the intervals between good rallies, Paul was applying his 'waste' tests to Ranelagh. He welcomed the

PAUL'S WIFE

preservation of its beautiful park between rather humble London suburbs (they had motored down to it through Walham Green and Fulham, and were to return through Hammersmith). He thought that the magnificent horses and horsemanship were an asset in war; he enjoyed seeing all the well turned-out, soldierly-looking young men, and the lovely women in their brilliant costumes—and that element was duly incorporated, too, in his spectre of cost. Those dresses, what did they cost? And how often would their owners wear them? There were plenty on the ground probably which would pan out at about a ten-pound note every time that their owners put them on. And this was altogether wrong and foolish in his eyes. Then the ponies swept past him, thundering over the beautiful turf, and he was carried off from his bogey again.

The woman standing at his side would not have been surprised at his moods; she said he was 'all moods.' And she did not mean to be disturbed by anything. She meant to think Paul responsive. One or two people sitting near commented in polite undertones on the way in which she was making the running. So did Paul at last, for he said, "Won't you sit down beside me, Vivy, and watch the game?"

"Do you want me to?" she asked, graciously smiling her pleasure.

"Of course."

Then he turned round to see if Rhoda was disengaged, so as to introduce her. But Rhoda had purposely turned to Freddy when she saw Paul in an intimate conversation with somebody else, and Freddy was a person who always made hay while the sun shone. Paul stood up while Vivien was walking round the rail to where they were sitting, and, when she came up to them, Rhoda naturally broke off her conversation with Freddy and awaited events.

"May I introduce my wife, Miss St. Ives?"

They shook hands.

"I am so glad to meet you, Mrs. Wentworth. We were so sorry that you did not feel well enough to come to us last night."

RUNNING PAUL WENTWORTH

It was on the tip of Vivien's tongue to say, "That sort of dinner gives me the hump," as she would have done seven times out of ten, for nothing gave her so much pleasure as being rude to Paul's friends. But Vivien could always check her naughtiness when she had a motive. And she wished to fish this pool, so she said, "I can't tell you how sorry I was, but my doctor has given me very strict orders about going out."

Her doctor's orders were to go out as much as possible, as the only cure for the moral malady which she called "the pip." Vivien enjoyed the falsehood involved in her repetition of the doctor's instructions. Rhoda took a hard look at her as soon as she had the opportunity, for which she did not have to wait long, as Vivien at once resumed her attentions to her husband. What could be the matter with such a picture of health and restlessness? She consulted Freddy, when he resumed his seat beside her. He had slipped away while the introduction was going on; he foresaw that he would have to talk to the newcomer and give up his innings to Paul, whereas by waiting for the stranger to monopolize Paul, as she evidently meant to do, he could have a better innings than ever. He took good stock of Vivien, however, for she came into his line of sight when he was talking to Rhoda, and he resolved that the introduction should come off when they were leaving.

"What is she suffering from, Freddy?" asked Rhoda, at dinner that night.

"Swelled head."

"I mean, really?"

"Swelled head. I'd eat my hat to see her with aunt."

"Hush, Freddy!" said Rhoda, smiling at the innuendo.

Vivien knew a good deal about horses, and points like the greenness of the grass and the horse-chestnuts supplied her with conversation, for grass like the turf at Ranelagh is not to be found in Australia, and horse-chestnuts steadily refuse to grow there.

So she could be intelligent and natural, which she knew was the proper bait for Paul. She also exerted her physical charm; but that was not for him. She did not suppose that he would notice it. She did it to

PAUL'S WIFE

annoy Rhoda, and politely spoil Paul's afternoon. But Rhoda was pleased, not annoyed. She had no consciousness of any personal feeling for Paul, and she was relieved to find his wife so presentable.

Paul, on the other hand, found Vivien, not misbehaving herself, for the first time *de trop*. He acknowledged to himself that she had not for years taken so much trouble to ingratiate herself, but he wished that she could have chosen some other opportunity. He had enjoyed watching the polo with Rhoda, though he had talked so little.

Presently, finding Rhoda so well occupied, Vivien's mood changed. "I must go back to the Chirnsides," she said, "or they will be wondering what has become of me. They brought me on from lunch."

Freddy stood up with Rhoda when she was saying good-bye, and Paul took the opportunity of introducing him. Vivien showed how nice she could be to Paul while she was saying "How do you do?" to Freddy and good-bye to Rhoda. She picked a lady-bird off his coat lapel, and gave a little wifely laugh of proprietorship.

"How beautiful your wife is, Mr. Wentworth, and how irresistible!" said Rhoda, when she had gone. "We were indeed deprived last night."

"Yes, there's no one like Vivy when she's all right," he said warmly, enthusiastically, because he felt that he ought to have been better pleased with Vivien's attentions, when she was for once trying to be nice.

Rhoda believed him to be referring to his wife's health. When they sat down again he found himself not looking at the polo with the same interest as before. He wanted to listen to Rhoda's pleasant voice, and cool himself, as it were, in her graciousness. That was what he told himself. Yet he looked for indications of more personal interest, and he did not look in vain. Vivien had overshoot herself. Her behaviour suggested to Rhoda that Paul was a member of the opposite sex, a King on the chessboard of a very beautiful woman, not an impersonal celebrity.

Before they parted she and Vivien exchanged invitations—engagements which Vivien meant to keep. Then

RUNNING PAUL WENTWORTH

Rhoda turned to her cousin with a half matter-of-course, half coaxing air, which bespoke the cousin on the footing of a sister with a subconsciousness that she was addressing a lover.

"Go and find father, will you, Freddy? I think we had better meet on the terrace. It's easier to see people there than inside."

Paul did not hear what Freddy said as he left them, but he noticed the way that his face lighted up at the innocent coquetry with which Rhoda laid her commands on him.

"Now let's walk slowly towards the house," she said. "I can't stay for the other matches. We have two people dining with us to-night who are going to the opera with us afterwards. We have room for you, if you'd like to come."

"I wonder what you'll think of me, Miss St. Ives, when I confess that the opera 'bores me stiff,' as we say in the Colonies?"

"I shall think that you tell the truth, which is a jewel in Society, where you so seldom hear the truth, unless it's malicious."

"Even that is welcome after the lying flattery of politics."

"Then do you think it's wrong to buy support with insincere praises?"

"They've a habit of coming home to roost, like curses. You have to make good the deference for these people's opinions which you have professed. And they're generally such groundlings."

"Well, what did you do? Were you able to get along without it?"

"I was, until the crash came."

"How did you manage it?"

"I used to tell them my opinions as vehemently as possible. I didn't ask theirs. I wished to convince them with mine."

"And you found that worked?"

"Yes. I suppose that in Australia we don't try to be so polite to each other in politics. We do our flattery there with shaking hands. We don't palaver a man with

PAUL'S WIFE

words, telling him that we admire his opinions and so on. We just shake hands with him, as an admission that he is a decent person, and he decides whether he will vote for us or not, according as we convince him or not at our meetings or in the reports of our speeches. Then in our speeches we go at it hammer and tongs ; we don't flatter our constituents. We go for our enemies and advertise the means we have discovered for restoring the Golden Age in our country."

"How noble and pristine!" said Rhoda, in genuine admiration.

"I am afraid it's only noble when there are large issues before the country, like the decision to help England in the Boer War. Instead of bribing constituents with lying flatteries we have to bribe constituencies with public works."

"What does that mean, exactly?"

"We give them railways, for instance, which make things pleasanter, but are so little needed really that no private company would undertake them ; or we give them a reservoir, or a new school, which the district has no right to ask-for on its population."

"Did you?"

"I did my best to set my face against it."

"With what result?"

"With the result that I and my party were thrown out by Labour."

"Well, what is the moral of it?"

"The moral of it is that no Liberal—if you understand by that *democratic*—Government is ever economical. They will not, or cannot, resist the pressure of their supporters, who clamour for this, that, or the other job at the public expense. It may be sound in principle, like an Old Age, Unemployment and Sickness Pension system, or it may be an utterly wasteful relief work. But every Liberal has lost sight of the attempt to keep down rates and taxes, which was the chief *raison d'être* of the Whigs from whom he claims to be descended."

"How do you explain it?"

"Quite simply. The Whig was not the progenitor of the Radical. He was simply a Tory who curried favour with the tax-payer, by starving the Services, and . . ."

THE DUTIES OF A SOCIAL ADVISER

CHAPTER V

THE DUTIES OF A SOCIAL ADVISER

FREDDY FENWICK cursed his luck as he went up in the lift to the flat at the top of the Albert Hall Mansions which the Wentworths had taken. He consoled himself, however, with the reflection that such outsiders might have taken a flat in West Kensington without a lift. Paul had mentioned that he always liked living on the top-floor, the only place where you could get any sun in a London house. Freddy considered the Albert Hall quite out in the suburbs. London, for him, was bounded by Park Lane at one end and Regent Street at the other.

He thought it was too bad of Rhoda, but he was powerless to protest. For as he encouraged her in the idea that he had no feeling for her beyond one of cousinly affection and the desire to help her in any way, he could hardly refuse the first favour she asked, although it would rob him of her society and saddle him with undesirable responsibilities.

Rhoda had been taken with a great enthusiasm for Paul Wentworth on that Saturday at Ranelagh. But, being an eminently sane, as well as a very well-brought-up girl, she did not think of excuses for *têtes-à-têtes*. Politics would bring her into his society often enough. Instead of that, she set herself to think how she could be useful to him in his conquest of London, and decided to lend him Freddy, who knew most people that could be of any use to him. Paul had been telling her of the despair to which he was driven in trying to discriminate in the invitations which were showered on them. It was so difficult to decide which needed accepting, and still worse to know what to say when one got to their houses.

She sang Freddy's praises to Paul, who admitted that Freddy was the kind of man he wanted for his intelligence-officer. And she sentenced Freddy to serve him.

"Dash his cheek!" growled Freddy, as he waited for the lift-man to take him up to his first interview with

PAUL'S WIFE

Paul, after this precious arrangement. "Does he think I'm a Baedeker's London or a Court Directory, that he accepts a loan of me from Rhoda? I call it jolly calm of Rhoda!"

It was in this mood that the immaculate Freddy was ushered by a woman servant into Paul's study. Paul came forward to meet him. Freddy noticed the stiffness of his figure, in its tweed suit, which was not very new and possessed no distinction of cut. And he noticed how the freckles covered the hand that he held out. He groaned inside at the *tout ensemble*. But the organization of political receptions, even in the cynical spirit in which he did it, had taught him to know a man when he saw one. It was something that he would not have to trot out a puffed-up ass like Purdy.

"Your cousin, Captain Fenwick, said that you would be willing to act as my Social Adviser."

"I don't know what you mean," answered Freddy, cloaking his feelings with his engaging smile, "but I told Rhoda that I'd do what you wanted."

"Well, first of all I want you to deal squarely with me."

Freddy thought that he ought to feel offended. But it was his habit to put his interests before his *amour-propre*, and Rhoda might have hinted this, as Paul made such a point of it.

"That's understood, isn't it?"

"Naturally."

"I know nothing of London Society and I want you to be a sort of walking Green Book, to explain what sort of people our invitations are from, so that I may know what we can refuse. I don't want to take up my time with useless parties; I don't want to be asked as a curiosity or out of mere hospitality. But I want to meet the people who are 'forces,' the politicians on both sides who count, the leaders in the City, the leading journalists and writers who are publicists—in fact, the people who count in the community for any reason at all, if it's only a sport or a fad. *The people who count*—those are the people I want to meet."

"Well, I know a good few of them personally, and the

THE DUTIES OF A SOCIAL ADVISER

rest by reputation, because, you see, I'm a professional diner-out."

"That's a profession I never heard of. Is there a club . . . or have you got rules?"

"No. We're all on our own. The professional diner-out is the man so much in request that he could take chambers where there was no cook. He has to make his arrangements a little ahead, of course, because there may be several people wanting him for the same night. He's as much an embellishment to the table as flowers are, and he goes where the food and the wine and the company are best. He may have mere Social recommendations to start with; but his powers as a conversationalist develop with practice, and if he shows a genius in this way, he can make substantial additions to his income by commissions from wine-merchants and house-agents. He keeps his ears open for people who want things, and always has something to recommend, and gets his commission if his recommendation is adopted."

"You seem to be the man I want. Our invitations are mostly from people we have never heard of."

Freddy was wondering whether he could get enough commissions out of Paul's friends to pay him for giving so much time to Paul, before he committed himself. But without waiting for his reply, Paul proceeded:

"Of course I don't expect you to do all this without adequate remuneration. Would . . ."—he named a very considerable sum—"repay you for . . .?"

"Repay me for being your Social Adviser? Yes. I think it is very liberal, but when will you want me in exchange for this?"

"Well, if you would give me two hours in the morning—say, from ten to twelve, and be here when we are entertaining people, and take my wife and sister to any shows you think they ought to see—like, say, the Royal Academy, or Henley—that is all I should ask. But for your own convenience, there'll always be a seat for you at our table."

"That's very handsome of you, Mr. Wentworth. I don't think you'll find me wanting as an S.A. Ah, but there's one thing," he said, as he was rising, "what about

PAUL'S WIFE

answering the invitations? I hardly ever write a line. You don't have to make explanations in telegrams, and you can ring off when it gets hot on the telephone."

"Oh, you needn't bother about that. My sister answers the invitations that have to be answered by one of the family, and my secretary does the rest."

"Well, that's fixed then, as far as I am concerned."

"Stop and have some lunch, will you? I expect that there are enough invitations accumulated to take us up to lunch."

"Oh, thanks very much."

Paul rang the bell. "Ask Miss Wentworth if she has time to do the invitations now, will you?"

Presently Vicky appeared. Freddy was surprised to find how much prettier she was than he remembered her at the *Lyonesses'* reception, and secondly he could not understand how a rough diamond like Paul could have such a smart sister. He did not know enough of Australians to be aware that the men think a rugged appearance virile and the women think beautiful dresses essential to the dignity of Australia, or to realize that Australian girls look better by day because they are of an Amazon type, which is not sufficiently developed in the right place to show off a *décolleté* costume, while its slender liteness lends grace and distinction to the same laces made up into a delicate summer afternoon dress. Vicky in the foaming chiffons in which she was going to a wedding after lunch was a dream of loveliness, even to the fastidious Freddy.

* * * * *

She led the way to a large writing-table, which was covered with invitation-cards, spread out as if she was going to play some new kind of *Patience* with them. Some were much larger than others; they were emblazoned with the arms of City Companies; many were coroneted; most were engraved or printed. Besides the cards, there were a number of letters arranged for economy of space in perpendicular rows, overlapping each other until they merely showed the names of the inviters. A space was reserved for an inkpot and a blotter, and in front of the latter Vicky seated herself, pulling out, as she did so,

THE DUTIES OF A SOCIAL ADVISER

the drawer on her left, which had divisions in it for various sizes of stationery. All the notepaper, envelopes and cards were of the particular thick pale blue linen mill on which Paul found it easy to express himself, but which was chosen by Vicky.

Freddy gave it the merest glance to see that there was nothing offensive about it. He was much more occupied with the excellence of Vicky's dressmaker and the exquisite way in which her hair, glittering like gold wire, lay on the slim white neck. Freddy loved a pretty back; he always said that there were ten pretty faces for one pretty back. "Besides," he used to say, "there is so much character in a back." He was paying more attention to it as he stood behind her, pretending to study the invitations.

In a few seconds she half-turned round. "Aren't we going to begin?" She was her brother's sister and had no idea of letting the grass grow under her feet.

Freddy was never at a loss—not even for money, though his income was nil. "Of course we are, but I was looking for the invitations of this month."

As the cards were arranged strictly in order of date, there was no need to look through June and July for the April invitations. Vicky would probably have seen through him if she had not had a retort ready. As it was, she said, "I've answered all the April ones."

"Well, why can't you manage the others if you managed the 'April ones'?"

"Paul did not wish to accept any invitations from strangers until he had a *Social Adviser*—which I call a horribly common expression and a common idea—so he made me decline them all."

"How did you decline them?"

"Previous engagement, of course."

"Oh, that was all right—they'll bob up again. Your brother's such a good draw."

"Shall we get to work, Captain Fenwick?"

"Right-ho—I mean, certainly."

"I'd rather you expressed yourself in your own language. You won't give me the fine shades of difference so well in any other."

PAUL'S WIFE

"Right-ho. 'Sir Peto and Miss Goldstein request the honour of The Rt. Hon. and Mrs. Paul Wentworth to dinner on,' etc."

"What are we to do about them?"

"Decline—Sir Peto is a tiresome old man in the House of Commons. They call him *Altiora Peto* in the House—I don't know what it means in Latin, but in English it means that he has philanthropic ideas which give a lot of trouble to the Party whip, and that he's an awful bore. People would shun him like the plague, if Ernestine wasn't such a dear."

"Who is Ernestine?"

"Miss Goldstein."

"Oh, I understand. Then we have a previous engagement for them."

"Right. Next man in. 'Mr. and Mrs. Amos Baldwin request the honour,' etc.—What's it to? Oh, dinner. You must go there. Baldwin is one of the big men in the Cabinet and at his table he's a perfectly sane and amusing man of the world, who seems to have studied the conversations in Oscar Wilde's plays. He only puts on his donkey's head in the House of Commons. There he's a most shameless betrayer of his country, who pretends to be converted by the wildest rot that the Irish and Socialists and Little Englanders . . ."

"But I thought you were a Liberal, Captain Fenwick?"

"Me? Good Lord!"

"Why, your cousin told me that you were her right hand in organizing all the receptions and movements of the Party, which she gets up."

"If I ever had been one, it would not have survived two of those receptions. I always wish the roof would fall in. I'm not what you call a patriot, but if I was a Samson I'd pull it down to free the world at one fell swoop of such a mischievous lot of cranks."

"But, Captain Fenwick, how shocking of you to get up agitations against your own side! How do you reconcile it with your conscience?"

"Well, I believe I do them good if it comes to that, by serving out the rope for the other side to hang themselves with."

THE DUTIES OF A SOCIAL ADVISER

“ Even if that’s true, it’s none the less disgraceful for you to do it.”

“ I really do it because I’m one of the family.”

“ What are your own family ? ” asked Vicky, missing the significance of this enigmatical remark.

“ They are as poor as mice. They don’t count. They live at Bournemouth.”

“ I don’t approve of you,” said Vicky. “ Amos Baldwins, accept with pleasure.”

“ Mr. and Mrs. Luke Froy request the honour, etc. He’s another of them—he’s a singularly clear-headed man of business. He has one small factory in England and half-a-dozen big ones in protected countries. The only work they do in the English factory is to make boxes stamped ‘ made in England ’ for the goods turned out in their foreign factories, when they are intended for home-consumption—that’s his idea of Free Trade.”

“ What does he do in his factories ? ” asked Vicky, slightly grimacing.

“ Makes matches. So does his wife. He’s rather a decent chap. When they drop on his game, he’ll be a Tariff Reformer. You must go there. They do you very well and have a great idea of mixing people up. You may sit next to Thomas Hardy and you may sit next to a coloured prize-fighter—they ask the best of everything to their parties, and they spend a fortune on them. “ Next man in ! Dr. and Mrs. Sidney Meek request the honour.” “ Oh, no ! Dr. Sidney Meek has a fat Church of England living, and if ever they create five hundred bishops to force a bill through for abolishing the Church of England, he’ll be the first. He is only Church on pay-days ; he spouts Nonconformist-Billingsgate from his pulpit, and flatters himself that he is the best Christian in London, because he is preaching from the text, ‘ I come not to bring peace but a sword.’ He also makes an affectation of Apostolical poverty by having a bad cook. I never heard anything in his favour except that he plays golf on Sunday afternoons. Now let’s try the Conservatives ! Mr. and Mrs. Keysmith request the honour . . . etc. Keysmith is a very great batsman. Unfavourable conditions merely furnish him with oppor-

PAUL'S WIFE

tunities for showing his powers. No man was ever so influential and respected as an Eton boy, and his Eton friends pushed him into the Cabinet at an early age. He is, as you might expect, one of the finest types of Englishmen, and he would have lived and died as an undermaster in a Public School if he had not been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His dinners are very dull, but your brother's about the first stranger he has ever asked to one. It's a greater distinction than a baronetcy, because that can be worked if you've got the money."

"What is his wife like?"

"Just what she would be like. We'll take St. Barbe with him—Mr. and Mrs. John St. Barbe request the honour of the Rt. Hon. Paul and Mrs. Wentworth to dinner, etc. *The Echo* twenty years ago jeered at him as 'The Gentleman of the House of Commons.' It was so jolly true that the name stuck, and you notice it more than ever in these last two Parliaments where there are so many chaps who look like the detective in *The Man from Mexico*."

"Then I suppose we are to go to the St. Barbes'?"

"We?"

"Yes. I always go about with my brother. My sister-in-law *won't* go."

"When I met her on Saturday at Ranelagh, I didn't think that she looked such an invalid that she couldn't tell whether she would be well enough to eat her dinner."

"Of course she didn't. She's as tough as nails. I don't believe she's ever known a day's sickness since she was born. The fact is that she lost my brother so many political supporters by accepting invitations and absolutely refusing to go when the time came, that at length he acquiesced in her attitude of declining every kind of duty."

"Well, how have you managed in England?"

"So far we've only accepted invitations from people we know, and they know that I am the one who goes out with Paul, not Vivien."

"And how are you going to manage with these acceptances you're going to write now?"

THE DUTIES OF A SOCIAL ADVISER

"I shall write 'Mr. and Miss Wentworth have much pleasure in accepting . . .' etc., etc., and underline the *Miss*, to show them that they've made a mistake."

"Beginning with the St. Barbes?"

"Beginning with the St. Barbes. Tell me a little more about Mr. St. Barbe."

"I have nothing to tell you, except that in appearance and manners, and . . . and inside, he's the man you would choose to exhibit as the model of an English gentleman, and he's really quite clever, though he never let on while he was at Oxford, for fear of hurting the feelings of the Bullingdon. The St. Barbes are such good people that they have only a moderately good cook . . ."

"Oh, bother their cook! So have we. I wouldn't have too good a cook for fear that she would behave badly."

"I think women-cooks are a mistake altogether," said the superior Freddy, whose income in cash was about twopence-halfpenny a year. "Ah, here's an invitation from a *Mr.* only. I should accept that; they always do you well, and Wildsmith is a good chap, though he was sent down from Balliol. It was only for being a little too fresh. His father was a tailor, I believe. But you'd only know it from his trousers. They're so perfect, yet so easy. Wildsmith generally gives his dinners at the R.A.C. They do you very well. But I don't like the members. There are too many merely rich people in the Club, who go about with an air of elation at its advertised advantages. Wildsmith is the man who skinned Sir Charles Russell—the late Lord Chief—at the height of his fame, before a crowded House, and has practically never spoken in Parliament since. He is a vulgar-looking little wretch, but the most damaging critic on the whole Conservative side."

The gong sounded for lunch. When they entered the dining-room two people were already there, a clean-shaven Colonial of about forty, and the beautiful Vivien, a shade too thin, perhaps, without her scarves and laces, but in a rather *outré* costume, a marvel of *chic*. Freddy thought he had never seen a more elegant and unusual type of woman, and he had given much study to the question. For now, for the first time, he saw the full

PAUL'S WIFE

glory of her hair, the *diablerie* of the small crimson mouth.

She and David Shand—the Colonial—had ceased to take any notice of each other before Vicky and Freddy entered. She was frankly not interested in him at all, and David, except in business and sports, was content to take the place accorded to him.

"Excuse me for being so long, David!" said Vicky, pleasantly.

"Of course!" he said, with his grave smile.

"Vivien, I think you've met Captain Fenwick?"

"I just succeeded," said Vivien maliciously. "He seemed to be trying not to meet me."

Freddy had the good sense not to attempt to deny the impeachment. "Can you forgive me?" he asked.

"Of course—you were frying the fish, as the Frenchman said!" she replied, for Freddy was the kind of young man who amused her, the sort who applauded her in her follies and never wanted her to do anything useful. So she was smiling and childish—her best behaviour. She said no more for the moment, because Vicky went on to introduce Freddy and the faithful Shand. She made great play with her long lashes in the few minutes before Paul trotted in. Paul was one of those men who get through most of their work by utilizing odd minutes.

"How do, Shand?" he said. "Everything going on all right in Australia?"

"Three inches of rain all over Captain Cook's Land, New South Wales and Southern Queensland."

"Capital!" The ordinary Australian, equally elated by this immense news, would not have gone further than "Not bad." That was where Paul Wentworth differed from other Australians and led them.

David Shand was a wool-broker. No one could make a closer guess at the year's clip. In figure he was the active, slab-sided Colonial who excels in sport. He had a shrewd, whimsical, cleanshaven face, which had helped him to his success in private theatricals, and a resolute blue eye which commanded respect in business—in which he was safe rather than speculative. He was correspondingly dull in society. But Paul owed much to him

THE DUTIES OF A SOCIAL ADVISER

in politics in the early coalition days, when the Constitutionalists were doubtful about trusting the Democrats. David, who was the business man of so many leading squatters, staked his reputation on Paul's honesty as a politician, and was a chief factor in winning him the respect of the great landed interest. Therefore, there was always a place for David when he chose to come to Paul's. And he came, for a man of his temperament, often, for to him Vicky Wentworth was the most charming woman in the world. He never told her so, either directly or by the inference of his attentions. He merely came and came, and her woman's instinct told her why. He had no attraction for her; she found him deadly dull. But he was so unassuming that she could welcome him without being misunderstood, which is more than you can do for most men if you are a very pretty woman.

Vivien made no sign of greeting to her husband when he came in, but he did not appear to notice the omission. When the eggs—poached with asparagus-tops—had been demolished, he said to her, "I suppose you're coming to the Marstons' with me to-night?"

"No. They give me the 'pip.'"

Mr. Marston was certainly not an interesting person, and his wife had even less claims on an exacting woman's time. But he was Vivien's guardian, and as such had done his best to keep her out of the marriage in which she took so little pleasure, so she should have been more grateful to him. The unimaginative Melbourne lawyer had honestly thought the match a monstrous one. Here was an artisan's son, who had begun life in a free school and was getting on at the Bar merely because of the favour of the notorious demagogue who held the position of Attorney-General, aspiring to the hand of one of the richest and best-born girls in Captain Cook's Land, and a girl of quite extraordinary attractions! She had just left school, where no task had been any trouble to her, if she chose to apply herself, and her courage and activity had made her a leader in sports. Her wild temper, relieved by passionate enthusiasms, was in itself an attraction. That Vivien Brooke should be determined to marry Paul Wentworth seemed to her

PAUL'S WIFE

guardian an outrage, because she was the daughter of one of the old school of squatters, sons of aristocrats, who found the same gusto in settling in the Australian Bush, with its perils from serpents and lurking savages and its illimitable space and opportunities, that the adventurous young aristocrat of to-day finds in big-game shooting in Central Africa. But the will had left Mr. Marston no control over her marriage or over her income. The principal she could not touch; the trust was as rigid as it could be made. There his powers stopped, unless on application to a judge in chambers he was supported in his veto of a marriage. He did, in fact, make such an application, but the Judge, himself a man of birth, had declared that the young Democrat barrister, from whom he differed so in his convictions, promised to be one of the brightest ornaments of the Melbourne Bar, had a fair and quickly-increasing income, and could in no way but birth be considered an unfit husband, and, concluding, said, "And this is a Democratic country, in which birth does not and ought not to count."

Paul never bore Mr. Marston ill-will for his opposition, and Mr. Marston, after coming into closer contact with him, formed such an opinion of his abilities, that he employed him in all his important cases.

For a while Vivien was interested in Paul's career, and in her perverse way useful to it. Her father's daughter's sympathies could not be with the Democrats; she merely tolerated her husband's connection with them. She refused to meet them, much less their families, socially. She urged her husband, with the incessance of a drop of water, to throw in his lot with the Constitutionalists, as more decent people. But she did not really trouble herself much with his career in Parliament. She was content to exhibit the famous Paul Wentworth as the captive of her bow and spear at dinner-parties. And it was part of her vanity to spend her money on keeping up a good establishment, as establishments go in Australia, for him. It is true that she told everybody, with a general absence of good taste, that the house was hers and kept up out of her money. Paul swallowed this, because he saw the paramount necessity of investing the

THE DUTIES OF A SOCIAL ADVISER

money he made by his practice in Melbourne suburban property. The intuition that carried him to the front at the Bar and in Politics told him that a huge land boom was approaching, when every corner in the suburbs would multiply in value outrageously. His intuition also told him that his wife would throw her money in his face in some other way if she did not do it in this. Already he knew that in marrying her he had taken up his cross, and that they would never be permanently happy together again. For Vivien was tired of her toy, and being absolutely selfish, no longer tried to pretend. She had, unfortunately, nothing to take its place in her occupations.

As the years went on it was obvious that she and Paul would have no family, and though she was a cold woman, her desire to have a child grew. Some women are born to be mothers and others wives. Vivien belonged to the former. And this was the one matter in which she cared vitally about Paul's opinions.

Paul's disappointment was even greater than hers, for not only would the presence of a child have given him a home, but it was a sad thing that a man who hoped to conquer the political world of Australia, a brilliant and vigorous man married to a beautiful and vigorous wife, with no money cares for the future, should have no children to inherit the name he was making. And yet, if the longed-for heir had come, it might have given him a passion for home which would have interfered with the extraordinary career that was before him. The result of their continued childlessness was to make her more and more objectless and discontented, and him more and more absorbed in politics. There was no open rupture between them. She was used to admiration of her beauty from the other sex, and that she still hankered for mildly. But Vivien was no fool, and having enjoyed the honest admiration of the greatest man in the land, she could not attach the same importance to the attentions of the tame cats who hover round a beautiful woman. For a while she was still subject to occasional waves of affection and admiration for her husband. He had enjoyed some ordinary triumphs more than his greatest, because they had fired the imagination of his beautiful girl-wife,

PAUL'S WIFE

who came to meet him as he returned from the battle, tricked out in her old witcheries of burning eye, flushed cheek, and child-like deference. But as the years drew on, these demonstrations became less frequent. His triumphs were so many that she lost interest in them, and relapsed in a whirl of amusements which she had a passion for attending, but regarded with lack-lustre eyes.

She approved of going to England, because London offers more amusements than any place in the world to those who only understand English. But she refused out of sheer naughtiness to go into London society with her husband. She revelled in the awkwardness that he must feel in explaining her absence.

Long since his forecast of the land boom had been justified. He sold his investments for many times the sums which they had cost him, and secured payment for them when the boom was at its height, before the reaction set in, and became one of the rich men of Australia. As soon as he became rich he settled a good income on his sister, and at length allowed her to accept his wife's invitation that she should live with them. The invitation was of some years' standing, but the situation was not one to which he was willing to expose her until she was entirely independent. He had preferred her acting as governess-housekeeper to "Money" Moreton; he preferred her eating humble pie to a stranger instead of to a woman whose heartlessness was so caddish as his wife's. But, in fact, she had few disagreeables to put up with at the Moretons', whose wealth compelled them to entertain on a scale to which their breeding did not rise, and who were willing to betray their gratitude to a woman whose prettiness and tactfulness made people enjoy their entertainments. Vicky was a born hostess, as witty as she was pretty, and at the Moretons' incessant and lavish entertainments acquired the ease and experience which were to be of such value to her in London.

Mr. Marston had felt the failure of the Wentworth marriage deeply. He saw enough of Paul in business to be convinced that the fault was not on his side. Vivien came much into Paul's conversations, busy man as he was, nor did he ever complain of her neglect and tire-

THE DUTIES OF A SOCIAL ADVISER

someness to himself, or weary of putting the best gloss on her neglect of others. If the Marstons spoke to Vivien herself about the matter, she was soon rude. And of late she had ceased to go to their house, not because she thought them worthy of her dislike, but because she grudged wasting time on them.

One night Mr. Marston had asked his ward and her famous husband to dine with them.

"Why won't you go to the Marstons' to-night, Vivy?" asked Paul. "You've nothing else on hand."

"I think I shall go to a music-hall. I must do something to get more amusement out of this dull place. I don't care for any of the people we are meeting." Then she suddenly remembered Freddy's presence. It was characteristic of her that though she imagined that ^{he} he was a sort of secretary, and secretaries may have to be seen and not heard, her face became wreathed with smiles and confusion, and she made the prettiest apologies.

Freddy could not know that Vivien was in this logically democratic. All men, whatever their position, were pawns for her amusement; her graciousness was strictly in accordance with the entertainment which she derived from their company. Vivien liked soldiers; they have a habit of bestowing their society freely on people whom they like and her one desire was to be amused. As Freddy had spent most of his time in the Army in India (where he had acquired his fine brick colour), on the Viceroy's staff, she had hopes of him. She frankly liked his appearance. He was beautifully upholstered, and adorned with the shy manner which he found as effective in dealing with women in private as his showier qualities were at parties.

Vicky would, of course, have been gracious to her brother's secretary, even if his social position had not been superior to their own. Her former position was so analogous. She did not feel sure how Vivien would behave, but Vivien was soon completely absorbed in a half-ragging conversation with him.

He was not too preoccupied to notice that the servants looked for orders to Vicky. Vivien was generally too lazy to concern herself with the affairs of the house,

PAUL'S WIFE

though sometimes she flamed out in wild and wicked words, with a refrain of, "I'm the mistress in my own house!" When she went too far, Vicky flamed back with, "Well, keep it yourself! I'm going to-morrow!" And then, Vivien, who had no desire to perform her duties, in a matter of minutes or hours, came cooing back. For one thing, she did not mind climbing down to Vicky, the one human being who had a permanent place in her heart.

Her maid carried her recantation to the pantry—was, in fact, ordered to do so. But as the servants had been engaged by Vicky, and knew that their stay in this liberal and comfortable home depended on her good opinion, Vivien's outbursts merely elicited their sympathy for Vicky.

Suddenly, in the middle of her ragging, Vivien said, "Are you doing anything to-night, Captain Fenwick?"

"No, Mrs. Wentworth."

"Then will you take two stalls for the *Empire* at Ashton's—I have an account there—and dine with us and take me on?"

Freddy was not often so nonplussed. His new chief had already expressed his wish pretty plainly that Vivien should go to the Marstons' with himself, and, in the face of this, here was the unfortunate Social Adviser, on his very first day of office, deliberately asked by Vivien, in Paul's presence, to take her to the *Empire*—on purpose to flout her husband, as it seemed. His blushes showed through the red sunburn of his face. He looked helplessly from husband to wife, and wife to husband.

Paul was quite undisturbed. With a friendly smile, he said, "You needn't trouble to go to Ashton's, Captain Fenwick—it will do just as well to call them up on the 'phone. Is there anything worth seeing at the *Empire*?"

Freddy wondered if this was what he called "a lead" for him to veto the *Empire*. But Paul's next words showed that there was no *arrière pensée*. So the polite Freddy allowed the *Empire* to go forward and addressed himself to Vicky.

"I suppose you will be going with your brother, Miss Wentworth?"

MEETING HIS MATCH

"No. It does not signify his going alone there, and I am glad of a night off. I get too much going out altogether."

"Then shall I get a ticket for you, too?" he suggested enthusiastically.

"Yes, do come, Vie!" said Vivien heartily.

But Vicky was obdurate. She hated music-halls, and did not see why she should put herself out to protect her sister-in-law from a rather imprudent *tête-à-tête*, when she knew that *têtes-à-têtes* still more imprudent were merely a matter of time. She would do no more than prevent them from dining together alone.

Freddy wondered what Paul would think. But Paul had no qualms; he knew how selfish his wife was, and her capacity for getting tired of people.

CHAPTER VI

MEETING HIS MATCH

A GREAT man—I think it was Lord Rosebery—once said that too great a proficiency at billiards is evidence of a misspent youth. In the same way, a deliberate preference of whiskey and soda to champagne may suggest that a man has lived too well.

This flashed through Vicky's intuitive mind when Freddy refused a choice vintage of Bollinger for the humbler "peg."

Vivien thought no thoughts, but expressed her pity. "Never take champagne? You might just as well never smile."

But Vicky cherished a hope that it might have been good taste that had made him refuse, rather than a bad liver.

For one reason or another, Freddy was at his best at that dinner. Not one of his ugly traits came out. He was such a clever hypocrite that he might have been behaving extra well to throw dust in Vicky's eyes on the eve of an adventure with her sister-in-law. On the other hand, he was such a man of contraries, that he may have been fired by a feeling of chivalry in the presence of the

PAUL'S WIFE

beautiful sister and wife of the man who had for the present lifted him out of his eternal difficulties about money. At all events, he created an excellent impression on Vicky before the car which they jobbed from a garage arrived to whisk him and Vivien off to the *Empire*. Paul Wentworth did not keep a car, although he was so rich. He attributed the waste of the wealthy mostly to their armies of useless servants, with an etiquette of waste, so he determined when he came to England to live in a flat attended by three women-servants of the highest competence, receiving tip-top wages, and to job a car by the year from a garage, instead of keeping private vehicles. Three hundred a year paid for car and chauffeur and repairs, and insurance against compensating the victims of the chauffeur's carelessness. An expenditure of more than three thousand a year, he said, no man in his position, with his small family, required, whatever his income might be, except for the mere upkeep of houses, and the size of the country mansions of the great nobles he considered a disgrace to the intelligence. The castles which these mansions displaced housed armies of fighters, who formed the protection of their lords and the military forces of their country, but the only armies these palaces ever contain are armies of greedy and unnecessary servants—a foolish survival of feudalism.

Freddy was fond enough of women to lose in their company the recklessness of the hard blue eye, which was the most disagreeable feature in his expression. Their presence softened him, as it had to-night at dinner. Therefore, Vicky had no qualms about letting him take her imprudent sister-in-law alone to the *Empire*.

Freddy had an Ascot feeling. He was sure of pleasant and beautiful society, and he might pull off a gamble. He was quite vain about his fascination for women, and he did not understand a nature like Vivien's. Vivien was often careless in what she said and did before men, because they really touched her as little as if they were on the stage and she was on the other side of the foot-lights. Her desire for men as men had no energy. All her driving power was in her selfishness and her temper. She had, moreover, excellent judgment. She saw what

MEETING HIS MATCH

was to her advantage at a glance; and when she flew in the face of it, as she constantly did, it was because being wicked or wasteful was her favourite form of excitement. She had the instincts of cruelty. As a child, she had started a huge bush fire on a station where she was staying, by setting fire to the tea-tree scrub, to see how far the conflagration would go. It would have been madness to let her go near a dynamite store. She had the kind of disposition which causes accidents for fun.

Therefore, in going from the car to her seat in the *Empire* she treated Freddy exactly as if he had been a husband of whom she was fond; she let him assume the airs of possession—which he was not slow to do. She let him understand by voiceless telegraphy as they sat down that he was to arrange her opera-cloak round her shoulders, and to linger over doing it. She touched him on the arm when she was amused. Her touch was light as a leaf, but charged with electricity. She toyed with her feet, the most beautiful he had ever seen, deliciously slipped, against the seat of the stall in front of her whenever the lights were up, and when she disturbed the coat-tails of the old gentleman who occupied it and he turned round fiercely, brought the whole battery of her witeheries into action for her apology—for Freddy's benefit, chiefly.

She liked music-halls. "They are no tax on the mind," she said, "You can talk while the performance is going on without expostulations from your neighbours. The performance generally has a dash of naughtiness, and sometimes is dashed naughty, and I feel so behindhand if there is anything especial which I have not seen going on at 'the halls.'"

She kept Freddy bubbling like a kettle before the boil. For her attitudes seemed deliberately provocative, and her comments were decidedly free. Yet when Freddy said anything insidious, it fell on deaf ears. There was no sign of approval or disapproval on her face; she simply did not appear to notice what he was saying. But when he had anything interesting to say about the performance she was a charming listener. She studied

PAUL'S WIFE

the performances as closely as if she had been going to write a criticism on them. She looked at them as keenly as sporting women look at the horses in a race, and had as little attention for anything else.

In the car she thanked Freddy so prettily for taking her that his mercury rose fast, especially when they arrived at the mansions and she insisted on his coming in. She had been quite solicitous because he would not leave her to have a whiskey and soda during the performance. She looked very gracious and very beautiful as they went up in the lift, and she let him in with a latch-key. Then she helped him off with his coat—another good sign—and said :

“Now come and have that whiskey!” and led the way to the dining-room, where there were a cold chicken and some sandwiches and a lobster salad on the table, and a couple of places laid, besides a hospitable array of drinks.

“Excuse me a minute!” she said, “while I go and slip into a tea-gown. Mix yourself a ‘peg’ while you are waiting.”

“Oh, I can wait!” said Freddy, with a little sigh of content.

She was a long time, but he soothed himself with pleasant expectations of what she would look like in that tea-gown. She certainly did look ravishing, but she came back with her arm round Vicky’s waist. Freddy felt for a moment like a man who is looking over a flat and turns the douche on by mistake while he is examining the bath. Then it struck him what a much more attractive woman Vicky was than Vivien, especially when he read in her manner a sort of apology for spoiling a duet.

His presence of mind did not desert him. He had the graciousness to look delighted at her staying up for them, and laid himself out to amuse her with his caustic comments on the company in which he and Vivien had sat, until both girls rocked with laughter. He had the tact to make Vivien describe the performances—as she had studied them. He succeeded in leaving them both greatly attracted.

Paul had come in early from the Marstons’ and gone

IN THE ITALIAN DRAWING-ROOM

to bed. To a Prime Minister, there is no such pleasure as bed at a reasonable hour, and he had grown so accustomed to Vivien's vagaries that he gave not one thought to the fact that she was out late at night with an attractive and reckless young man, whom she had never seen until the preceding Saturday afternoon.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE ITALIAN DRAWING-ROOM

A FEW days after that Saturday afternoon at Ranelagh and the installation of Freddy as Paul's Social Adviser, it was Vivien who suggested taking up the invitation renewed to her personally to go and see Rhoda's Italian drawing-room. Freddy had been deputed to arrange it on the telephone, and he accompanied her, Vicky and Paul, to Lyonesse House.

The name Italian drawing-room connoted almost nothing to her, but with her devilish quickness she had realized that Paul was attracted to Rhoda as she had never noticed him being attracted to any other woman, and it interested her. She was not at present influenced by any desire to put a spoke into their wheel; she only wished to have the amusement of watching Paul in the web.

She soon grew tired of it. She had gone for the novel spectacle of seeing Paul, the preoccupied politician, dancing attendance on a Society woman.

And when they were there, Paul sat down and gazed not at the woman, but at the pictures and furniture, as quiet as if he had been stunned, and Rhoda left him to soak it in, merely answering his questions when he found his tongue, and devoting herself to wandering round the room with Vicky, who appeared to have to talk herself into the proper mood to approach the gems of the collection, as Rhoda took her up to them.

There was much in the room which Rhoda would gladly have banished, for Lord Lyonesse's taste was the reverse of infallible and the dealers in Florence had used every avenue to his long purse. It did not signify

PAUL'S WIFE

that the things which they had sold to him were genuine and valuable of their kind. They were things to sell, not things to buy. And Rhoda knew this, because their circle included so many of the leaders of the Art world, as well as the Political, Literary and Theatrical worlds, and it was natural for artists and art-critics, above all men, to lavish their friendship on the daughter of such a house—a beautiful and elegant girl in her twenties. Rhoda preferred the Art-critics. Her intelligence was omnivorous; their conversation was that of singularly accomplished men, while some of the most famous artists were no more intelligent than musicians.

Living in the society of connoisseurs, and rich enough to be a collector herself, Rhoda ended by becoming no mean connoisseur. She could see, of course, that neither Vicky nor Paul had any more acquaintance with Italy by reading than they had by travel, but she could see also that they would be lovers at first sight when they were confronted with Italy, the beautiful daughter of a glorious past, with the sunshine transmuting her faded robes. So, with her platform instincts, she made the Italian drawing-room of Lyonesse House her text for proselytizing them for Italy. She was right in gauging that Paul would prefer to take things in his own way, talking when he had questions to ask about the things which excited his interest, rather than listening to a lecture-catalogue.

When the Wentworths first came in, she was prepared to leave Vicky to Freddy, and devote herself to Paul and his wife. And when Paul, after saying "How do you do?" became absorbed in the gay city life of the fifteenth century, which formed the background of a Pinturicchio picture, she turned warmly to Vivien.

"I am so glad that you have been able to come to-day."

"It was very nice of you to ask me, after I had backed out of dining with you."

"I'm sorry you did not feel up to coming," said Rhoda politely.

"I never do!" said Vivien, with sudden candour.

"Dinners get on my nerves. I always make Vicky go instead of me, when the time comes."

IN THE ITALIAN DRAWING-ROOM

"Well, then you must come at some time that suits you better—tea or something." Rhoda was unruffled; she meant Paul Wentworth to come into the Party Battalion—a special contribution from her. "Do you like Italian things, Mrs. Wentworth?"

"Which are the Italian things?" asked Vivien directly; she never pretended.

"Oh, pretty well everything in this room."

"Yes, they are very nice."

"Vivien isn't much interested in old things," said Vicky, coming to the rescue:

"Then take compassion on me, Mrs. Wentworth. I'm a very young thing!" said Freddy, leading the way to the most comfortable sofa.

She sank down with a sigh of comfort. He planted a chair a few feet away from her, so as to enjoy the charming lines into which she had composed herself.

"So you don't care for Italian things much, Mrs. Wentworth?"

"I didn't say so. But, between ourselves, I don't think that it matters where things come from. As far as I am concerned, they come from a shop."

"But these are very old," said Freddy, who would have cared no more about them than Vivien, if he had not been born to them.

"I don't think it matters how old things are so long as they are sound."

Freddy looked at her, as he said afterwards, to see if she was "pulling his leg" or not, and for the life of him he could not say. Was she trying to be funny, or was she blankly herself?

"You don't get anything for modern things when you die and they have an auction of your things," he said sententiously, "and old things are generally better, unless they are baths."

"I never look ahead like that," said Vivien. "There's enough to pay the devil for without that."

"What price bills of sale?" said Freddy sagely.

Bills of sale meant nothing to Vivien, so she said rather inconsequently, "Paul's a nice sort of man to take out calling. He looks as if he was still watching the polo."

PAUL'S WIFE

"I wish I could follow you, Mrs. Wentworth."

"Why, he's still got his 'sports stare' on him. You have to wake him up before he hears you when he has that look on."

"Well, you know, Mrs. Wentworth," said Freddy, more seriously, "there are some things worth staring at here—lovely old things which belonged to people like Bianca Capello and Isabella d'Este."

It was now Vivien's turn to stare. "You're as bad as the rest of them, Captain Fenwick—a walking auctioneer's catalogue."

"I didn't mean any harm!" said Freddy, in a mock apologetic voice.

CHAPTER VIII

VICKY WENTWORTH

FREDDY had not realized the full pleasantness of his engagement which he had entered into with Paul Wentworth. He was Paul's Social Adviser; but unless Paul required information on some definite point, he seldom saw him. For Paul was in the habit of delegating everything which did not belong to the great business of the Empire to his sister. The acceptance or refusal of private invitations he left to her, and he had no reason to consult Freddy about the public and official invitations. So in effect Freddy was Vicky's Social Adviser, not Paul's.

He conceived a profound admiration for her. She contrived to hit it off with her sister-in-law—that was a miracle—and otherwise made things work smoothly in an unconventional household. The meals and the furniture would satisfy the most fastidious. The jarring notes were Paul, who was too great a man to need to distract himself with conventions, and Paul's wife, who was, to use Freddy's words, "a holy terror." She was an adult *enfant terrible*, who acknowledged no restraints; she took a savage pleasure in outraging accepted ideas, and seemed incapable of gratitude or good feeling. Her motive power, like a motor-car's, seemed to be supplied by a series of explosions.

But everything was smoothed over by Vicky's serene tact. Freddy had admired her diffidence, as she had admired his good-nature that night, when Vivien had brought her in to spoil a *tête-à-tête*, and on the next morning her tell-tale smile was a quiet hint to bury the incident. They went through the invitations rapidly, and then, as Paul had an appointment with the Colonial Secretary, Freddy suggested that they should go out and amuse themselves in Bond Street or the Park. Because it was such a reasonable thing to do—they only had to cross the road from their mansions and saunter up under the trees beside the Serpentine, Vivien refused to do it.

"I can't be bothered!" she said.

Freddy was not sorry. On principle he preferred a *tête-à-tête*, and it was impossible for Vivien to be interested without being exacting. But Victoria Wentworth was as natural as her sister-in-law was the reverse, and fell in with Freddy's cunningly-thrown-out suggestions as a matter of course.

Realizing how pretty and frank and sympathetic she was, Freddy thought that any inch of the Park would be preferable to the favourite promenade by the Row, where Society arranged its chairs. There, with his enormous acquaintance, he would have to waste half his time in what he called "passing the time of day" to people. Everyone would wonder who the pretty, well turned-out girl, to whom he was paying so much attention, was, and he would be advertising the fact that he had, as he put it, "entered domestic service."

He suggested to Vicky that the Row—which he had spent so much of his time in adorning—was rather a bore, that the seats under the Serpentine trees were cooler.

"I love looking at the water through them," she said. "You don't know what a glimpse of Paradise it is to an Australian to see a sheet of fresh water like that through an avenue of deciduous trees."

Freddy looked at her quizzically, with knitted eyebrows—a trick he had—as if to say, "Whatever are you talking about?" He did not know that every child in Australia talks about *deciduous* trees to distinguish them from the evergreen native trees, whose foliage never is

PAUL'S WIFE

green, but a dusty grey, and casts no real wholesome shadow with its perpendicular leaves, or that most of the inland swamps, as they call small lakes in Australia, are saltier than the sea. But she told him. Australians are fond of comparisons, and she grew so informative that he suggested going on to the little waterfall at the Serpentine head to look at the rabbits. "They're so jolly fat," he said inconsequently.

"Rabbits?" she said. "Are you making a zoo of rabbits? We're trying to poison them off the face of the earth!"

The tactful Freddy did not let her get started about rabbits. He said quickly, "I know all about the rabbit question in Australia. You'll never get rid of them until some American forms a trust to breed them. Then the people who are going to get their dividends out of tinned rabbits and chimney-pot hats will be disappointed somehow."

"Chimney-pot hats?" echoed Vicky inquiringly.

"Yes, 'toppers.' Didn't you know that they were made of rabbits' fur—that every well-dressed man always has rabbit on the brain?"

"The man with rabbit on the brain in the Park often reminds me of those cranes," said Vicky, pointing with her parasol at the storks standing on one leg and watching the bystanders with downcast eyes.

"Make a joke about 'storking' the ladies! Is that your idea?" said Freddy.

As often happens, the exchange of feeble chaff between them broke the ice, and before they went home to lunch Vicky had divined that this butterfly Captain, who had been proverbial for his follies in the Regiment, was no fool in brains, but rather a shrewd observer of human frailties, who committed them himself because he thought that everything was too futile to be of any consequence.

And he felt that he had met his fate—a woman as healthy in body and mind as she was pretty and correct, and crisp and direct in her conversation. From this moment he began to dismiss Rhoda—since he never would be allowed to marry her—from his mind.

They made a very pretty pair as they sat under the

VICKY WENTWORTH

trees—the girl rosy and fair, with hair like burnished gold, and the short straight nose and well-curved chin, significant of courage and good humour; the man with a fair skin burnt to a brick red under tropical suns, devil-may-care blue eyes, defiant, clean-cut features, and a military figure. No one in London dressed better than Freddy; his clothes looked as though they carried out the latest ideas; they were merely admirably chosen, admirably cut, set off by perfect linen and a tie given just the right pinch; his patent leather brogues, made with the greatest care, were thick and only allowed to fit conventionally. His dark grey silk socks, though they looked so ordinary, were really a feature of his costume. They were made for him at Constantinople, of silk as thick as wool, and were strong enough to march in—a trivial detail, it might seem, but significant of the attention he gave to his costume and its deliberate simplicity. It was only in his top-hat that he really wished to be conspicuous. He would give any price for perfect shape and gloss, and wore a heavy hat to secure rigidity of form.

They chattered on light-heartedly, the best of friends, until it was time to go in for lunch, and then the tall young soldier, with the glossy hat tipped back and the morning-coat bunched forward to just the correct exaggeration, and the pretty Australian girl, with her straight, slim figure softened by the pale chiffons and laces of a summer frock, and her prettiness accentuated by a hat whose bold ribbons rivalled the snakes on Medusa's head, strolled down towards the Albert Memorial, as if they were going to give the rest of the day to studying it, instead of passing it by unconsciously on their way to a mayonnaise and outlets of the kind which go with green peas.

Vivien watched them coming down the Albert Hall steps of the Park, and met them at the door with a sheet of black paper and a pair of embroidery scissors.

“Captain Fenwick,” she said, “may I cut out your portrait?”

It was the only accomplishment which she kept up, except dancing. And she was clever enough to have had a dozen. At lunch she sparkled. She intended to extinguish Vicky, who surrendered without a struggle, and

PAUL'S WIFE

devoted herself to giving orders to the two maids, chiefly with her eyes. Paul asked Vicky if Freddy had pointed out the celebrities to her. She shook her head, but gave no explanation.

"I shouldn't have thought it of you, Vic!" said Vivien, with maliciously bad taste.

Freddy was politic, and apologized. "Miss Wentworth needed a rest. She had answered dozens of invitations before we went out."

"Vie needed a rest? I wish I'd seen her! It would have been my first chance, after knowing her twenty years! She must have looked quite interesting."

"Thank you, Vivien. It is the first time that you have ever allowed that I could look interesting!"

To which Vivien, who had no desire to hurt Vicky, but was only letting her tongue run away with her, rejoined, "I appeal to you, Captain Fenwick, how can any girl who is so pretty and healthy look 'interesting'?" It was quite in her style to kill two birds with one stone, by trying to embarrass Freddy with her compliment to Vicky, which was genuine enough. But Freddy was too old a bird to be caught with chaff.

"I am no judge," he said. "I look for principle in a woman, not interest."

"Oh, please don't!" retorted Vivien. "I can be highly interesting at times, but no one ever accused me of being high-principled."

"You're doing it yourself! *Qui s'excuse s'accuse!*" Freddy spoke French fluently; one of his aunts had married a Parisian banker, and had charming daughters. The girls spoke little English, and Freddy paid them lengthy visits—on the plea of brushing up his French for a diplomatic appointment.

CHAPTER IX

THE MEETING AT THE QUEEN'S HALL

CLEARLY the nation was in one of those moods when the wobblers, the birds who are to be caught with chaff, the floating voters who decide the fate of all elections, were likely to vote British, which is always disastrous for "the

THE MEETING AT QUEEN'S HALL

Ostriches." So a great meeting in the Queen's Hall was arranged, at which the leaders of the Party were to speak upon **THE CRISIS**. The indefinacy of the placards excited no surprise. It was part of the "Wait and See" policy, and after all, the only important features in the placard were the date and place. The "lambs" would attend in equal numbers, whatever the meeting was labelled.

Lord Lyonesse was on the platform. Rhoda sat in the front row of the stalls. Lady Lyonesse was entertaining a few scoffers at dinner, "to take the taste out of her mouth." Every seat in the hall was filled. The galleries fluttered with little white linen flags, printed with mottoes in which confidence in the Party leaders played a more conspicuous part than concern about Great Britain.

A tumult of applause greeted the Prime Minister when he arose, and seemingly inextinguishable tumult when he sat down. Yet he had done no more than juggle as usual with facts, promises and responsibilities, and acquit himself of political dishonesty before that not very discriminating audience by consummate forensic ability.

Then the Chancellor rose, and with words of flame endeavoured to transfer the public anxiety from the existence of the country as a Great Power to the existence of grievances against Peers and landlords; and then the Home Secretary out-paradoxed Mr. Bernard Shaw with Chocolate-Soldier suggestions about the Army and Navy and Treaties with Germany. One and all of them hurtled their wrath not at the enemy who was threatening the Empire, but at their political rivals, who had committed the monstrous crime of calling attention to the National peril. When the Chairman called upon the Right Honourable Paul Wentworth, "late Prime Minister of Australia and a life-long Liberal," to address the meeting, the meeting was in a high good humour, having shouted until the walls of the Conservative Jericho must be as flattened out as the building sites in Kingsway.

To Rhoda, sitting in the stalls, Paul, with his six feet two of stature, towered like a giant as he rose and walked to the front of the platform. He did not stand behind the little lectern. He would have nothing between him and his audience. He had brought some notes with him,

PAUL'S WIFE

but he held them rolled up like the baton of a Field-Marshal. He had not expected that any assemblage of Britons would be called upon to listen to such sentiments as the audience had not only received well, but with enthusiasm. He had thought to find all party cries forgotten, and the Liberals clamouring for preparations, like the Conservatives ; he had got ready a speech in which he contrasted their usual concern for the tax-payer in Army and Navy matters with the cry of Country which now swept through their ranks, and lo ! when he got there not one word was there of real concern for their country. It was " Down with the Conservatives ! " not " Down with Germany ! " and his patience was exhausted.

He told them how he had attempted to see with the eyes of English Liberals ever since he entered politics a quarter of a century before, recognizing that it was in consequence of the *laissez-aller* creed of the Manchester School that the Colonies acquired rights of self-government, so considerable that in many respects they stood in the position of affiliated republics.

Some applause showed that the idea of the Colonies turning into republics appealed to a section of the audience. But their comments were less favourable when, having said that, he declared that whenever the Colonies pressed for it seriously, this school of politicians would grant them complete independence, and added that at that time he was unable to see a better outlook, since the interferences of the Home Government were invariably ignorant and ill-judged. He reminded them how when Sir Thomas Mellwraith took possession of half New Guinea on behalf of Queensland, Downing Street promptly made him renounce it, and almost as promptly Germany snapped it up : how when the French were filehing islands from Australasia, Downing Street turned a deaf ear to Colonial cries for protection : how when the French oppressed the inhabitants of Newfoundland, it was made abundantly clear that in any dispute between the Colonies and a foreign Power, all that England would do was to bind the hands of her Colonists to prevent them giving any trouble to the aggressor : how when questions arose between Canada and the United States, the Cana-

THE MEETING AT QUEEN'S HALL

dians had not been allowed to settle for themselves, but England had stepped in to carry on the negotiations and, being afraid of the United States, and caring nothing for her Colonies, gave away everything which was of sufficient value for the Americans to claim it.

None of these grievances seemed to possess even an academic interest for the audience, but their indifference vanished when the speaker passed on to the events in South Africa which led to the War. He did not forget, he declared, that it was a Conservative Government which had turned a deaf ear to the complaints of the English in the Transvaal whom Krüger was deliberately oppressing with the idea of driving them out ; that it was a Conservative Government who neglected the repeated warnings that Krüger was preparing for war with England ; that it was a Conservative Government who, when the Colonists attempted to defend themselves, took the part of their oppressors, though the Conservative in the street had the decency to show regret. He maintained that if Krüger had had the sense not to declare war, he might have tortured and murdered the English in the Transvaal to his heart's content—the Colonial Office would not and could not, in England's state of unpreparedness, have lifted a little finger to help them.

A voice : " That was Chamberlain ! "

Paul thanked the interrupter for reminding him that even so great a man as Chamberlain had been held back by the political Mrs. Grundy, the canting old woman who, ever since the spectre of Napoleon was laid, had made it an axiom of British politics that it was unsafe to have an efficient Army.

The audience was bored : the audience tried to break the speaker's nerve with interruptions ; the audience tried to drown his voice with hooting. But Paul was an old hand at facing a hostile crowd, and he had the metallic Australian voice which carries so marvellously, and he had something to say which he meant them to hear. The uproar doubled as he declared that Krüger gave the Empire its chance by forcing it to fight ; that no English statesman on either side would have dared to take the responsibility of declaring war, though it was absolutely

PAUL'S WIFE

essential if the Empire was to continue to exist. And the uproar was so great that he was unable to proceed for some minutes when he said that Mr. Chamberlain was the first English statesman who ever understood the Colonies or won their hearts.

When the noise had subsided a little he said that once, and once only recently, had the Liberals won the sympathies of the Colonies, when they raised the great agitation against the employment of the Chinese in South Africa. Public opinion in Australia had been very bitter over their employment. The Australians had given their blood, they cried, to keep South Africa for England, and now England was going to hand it over to the Chinese, so abhorred in Australia. But thinking persons in Australia had perceived that it was from no love of Australia or hatred of the Chinese that the English Liberals began this agitation, else why was the cry based on the enslavement of the Chinese—enslavement which consisted of precautions that every man in Australia considered grossly insufficient? In one breath the agitators fanned the hatred of the English working-man against the Chinese and tried to enlist his sympathy against what was so falsely called the enslavement of the Chinese. The British Liberal was thinking neither of justice to Australian susceptibilities, nor of protection for White Labour in South Africa, nor of the Chinese slavery; his one idea was to dish the Conservatives.

Yells of fury greeted this declaration, but as soon as he could be heard again, Paul pressed the charge home. The same men who conducted this agitation against the employment of the Chinese in South Africa were quite capable, he declared, of agitating for the repeal of the Anti-Chinese legislation if enough Nonconformist clergymen thundered from their pulpits against the injustice to humanity in excluding the Chinese from Australia. The uproar continued unabated. It was only by superhuman efforts that he made the audience hear as he rose to his climax. "The Government which came in on this cry of Chinese Slavery is the worst for the Colonies that has ever existed!" he cried.

"What about the pacification of South Africa? What

THE MEETING AT QUEEN'S HALL

about the Union ? What about Botha ? ” rang from all parts of the hall.

“ You could pacify any country that way ! ” he retorted. “ Lincoln could have pacified the Confederate States in five minutes by allowing them Home Rule, indemnifying them for all their losses, and expelling everyone from their borders who had fought for the Union. You have given the Boers the control not only of their own States, but of all South Africa. You have showered gold on them like the Alabama award, to indemnify them for their losses sustained in fighting against you in a war which you waged with unparalleled humanity. But what of the Loyalists, the men who fought for England ! Instead of indemnifying them, you allow them to be dispossessed of any positions which they held, by the men whom they conquered in war.”

A Cabinet Minister on the platform sprang to his feet. “ I must protest against the speaker's talking of the loyal South African Government in this way ! ”

“ Oh, I grant you that it is loyal. Who wouldn't be loyal when they had won more than they fought for ? But what of the English who fought for us, and whom we have left in the lurch, with their farms and their banking accounts ruined by the war, and deprived of their offices by their conquered enemies ? I declare that South African loyalty is based on the betrayal of our friends. I have not one word to say against Botha ; I think he is one of the greatest men in the Empire. For the Boers generally I have a profound admiration. They fought like men to become a nation, and they will found a great nation under the British flag. But why cement it with the blood and ruin of the men who fought to save the flag ? It is not the Boers I blame, but the men who, in building up the great edifice of the South African Union, forgot to include our friends in the Promised Land. I trust that this was not a matter of Party revenge.”

The Cabinet Minister was on his legs again. “ I protest . . . ”

Paul looked to the Chairman, who said, “ I think it is only common courtesy to our Right Honourable *friend* ” (he laid a strange emphasis on the word) “ from

PAUL'S WIFE

Australia to hear him out. And," he added dryly, "what he is saying seems to me of very special interest."

"I am afraid that I shall have to trespass on your courtesy a little longer," said Paul grimly. "I shall not detain you upon the all-important question of trade. The class who regard the decline in our naval and military fighting strength with most equanimity appear to be equally philosophical as to the decline in our trade." There were derisive yells of "Tariff!" but the meeting listened rather more quietly while Paul adverted briefly to the door being banged and barred in the face of himself and Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. Seddon when they had approached the great question of the Commercial Union of the Empire at Conferences. Some of his arguments were quoted pretty generally by the Press. "If blood is thicker than water," he said, "commerce keeps longer than blood. There are four hundred million consumers in the Empire. If we have a Tariff Union into which all other nations who will grant complete reciprocity may come, the foundation-stone of real Free Trade is laid. If you hesitate long, Canada, one of the principal pillars of the house, will have been thrown down by the Samson of the United States. England's last markets are at stake. America can absorb all the Colonies have to sell and will become the centre of their commercial system. But we are not here to talk Tariff, any more than we ought to be here to inflame popular feeling against the opposite Party. We are here, though the gentlemen who have spoken before me have hardly alluded to the fact, to discuss the question of National Defence in the face of imminent invasion. You, Sir," he said, pointing to the First Lord of the Admiralty, "have done your best to prevent England keeping her place in the race for naval supremacy. You have equivocated about the progress of Germany; you have equivocated about the delays and defects in our own Navy; you have resisted every agitation to secure more ships or greater efficiency. We must, however, be grateful to you for not destroying one third of the Navy and substituting a naval reserve, manned by the postmen, tram-conductors, shop-assistants and so on, who constitute the personnel of the Force which you, Sir "

THE MEETING AT QUEEN'S HALL

—he turned to the Secretary for War—"consider will be as useful in stopping the march of an invading army from the Essex ports to London as the forty thousand men of the Regular Army which have disappeared in your Territorial Paradise, with the entire Militia Force. You have known for years that this invasion was becoming more imminent. You had a start with your Navy which could never have been wiped out if you had built ship for ship, not against the next two navies combined, but against that one navy which has been built for your destruction. And you, Sir," he said, turning once more to the War Secretary, "if you considered an increase in your regular army impossible, you could have made the scheme of citizen-service a reality by adopting some system like the Norwegian, or the Swiss, for the universal military training of your young men. No one could say that the Swiss have sacrificed commerce to militarism, yet they are the best trained nation in arms. Any *territorial* system which is not compulsory is a farce. The training must not be left to the option of the men or their employers. They must be compelled to give so much time, to undergo so much drill and training. If such men go into action with a highly-trained foreign army, properly gunned, I warn you that it will not be a battle but a Massacre of the Innocents. You can do nothing now but trust in God and in your starved and undermanned Navy. If your 'first line' does not fall a victim to treachery or surprise, you may be able to stave off actual invasion for the six months you claim for the training of your Territorials after war has begun. Was there ever such a shutting of the stable door after the horse is stolen? It will be one of the laughing-stocks of history. The one question before you to-day is not how to shift the fury of the nation on to the Opposite Party, but how to use that Territorial six months, if you get it, for the establishment of Universal Service. And if you do not use it, then all England will cry as I do, 'Woe unto ye Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!'"

There was another outburst of indescribable fury as Paul sat down, with crossed legs, to await the denunciations which greet a political Balaam.

CHAPTER X

ALONE IN HIS GLORY

EVERY political man who cuts himself from those with whom he has been associated is conscious of an abyss having opened at his feet, but he may find enough firm ground to walk on if he turns his face. To have publicly cut off his connection with the Liberals was not a great matter in itself, for the Australians had not been in practical sympathy with them since they had joined them in agitating against the admission of the Chinese into the Transvaal. Australians had felt so strongly in this matter that they had been obliged to welcome any allies, though these allies made the harsh treatment of the Chinese their chief plank and they thought it criminally lenient.

On his present visit to England, Paul had been associated principally with Liberal politicians for a minor reason. He had been Lord Lyonesse's trump card for entertainments, and he had spent much time at Lyonesse House, because he had never been attracted to any woman so much as to Rhoda St. Ives. In the company of Lord Lyonesse he had been thrown into constant contact with leading Liberals, and, meeting them socially and familiarly, he had seen their good qualities as men, and had sympathized with them in having to adapt their intelligence to the caucus level, which he, in Australia, had always refused to do. He had seen a good deal of some of them, and had been in their company to all sorts of Liberal meetings. But in addressing meetings he always merely thanked them for their welcome and talked in a light after-dinner vein, excusing himself from alluding to politics on the ground that he had not yet had time to form any opinion worth hearing. He had attended very few Conservative political gatherings, because Rhoda looked hurt if she read of his being present at them, and he could always be present, when he chose, at the debates in the House of Commons, if he wanted to know more about Conservative opinions than he could read in the newspapers or hear at dinner-parties.

ALONE IN HIS GLORY

Rhoda shepherded him carefully for her Party, and worshipped him for herself. The Man, with his directness and his unconquerable good spirits, in spite of the skeleton in his cupboard, appealed to her frank, unconventional nature. Rhoda was essentially unconventional; she had escaped the entanglements of love because love had not interested her. Her mind had been taken up with public affairs, studies and hobbies. The Politician appealed to her even more. On British Party politics he was reticent; except on that one occasion he had always taken refuge in its being impertinent for him to express an opinion on such a short acquaintance. But on the larger questions which are more political economy than politics, he expressed his opinion readily, and was singularly level-headed and free from shibboleths. The absence of shibboleths came as a blessed relief to her. She had lived in an atmosphere where most things were decided by shibboleths glibly quoted. She had had to deal principally, not with the Crookes and Bellocs, but with the Jarretts and Spratts of her party, who dealt in parrotisms like "Your Food will cost you More," and were valuable for the district-visiting jobs of politics, but duller than ventriloquists' dolls as companions. Rhoda, as a political head-centre, kept an army of them going, and rewarded them by talking to them at her parties.

So keen was she about her mission that she had not felt the ennui of it until she and Paul became interested in each other. The Jarretts and Spratts might be useful, but they could never be human. They were mixtures of the beadle and the socialist, while Paul was a Prime Minister of pioneers, a man who for twenty years had made adventurous Australians come round to his way of thinking. Rhoda had never thought that any action of hers needed explaining. As a matter of fact, her actions had seldom needed any explaining, because she had been so taken up with politics. When she became monopolized with Paul, her actions still seemed above comment to her, but others might have thought otherwise if they had known how much time Paul, a man with a beautiful wife, of whom he saw so little, spent in Rhoda's company. To Lord Lyonesse Rhoda seemed to be straining every

PAUL'S WIFE

nerve to capture Paul politically. Paul might be a very sound Liberal in his opinions. But he certainly was not a docile member of the organization. Rounding him up into the fold was no easy matter.

Lady Lyonesse liked Paul. He and Vicky were the first recruits ever admitted from what were ironically called her *salons* to her dinners. Her set were all of them interested to meet Paul, who could speak as one having authority without ever allowing himself to be drawn into political discussions, and it did not signify whether Vivien came or sent Vicky in her place, for Vicky was engaging, and Vivien's brusqueness was considered refreshing—in so beautiful a woman. Paul and Lady Lyonesse interested each other. He enjoyed impeachments of the hypocrisies of British politics, a subject which was always on the tip of her tongue, and she enjoyed his judgments, delivered with Colonial directness into her private ear. Freddy had taken him to a better tailor. That Lady Lyonesse had taken him into her wayward friendship made his intimacy with Rhoda natural. No one had troubled about it but the two chief actors, who sought each other's company.

And now it was all over. Lord Lyonesse had looked inexpressibly pained as they shook hands on leaving the platform at the Queen's Hall. His heart had seemed too full for him to say anything. Paul had not wasted time on shaking hands with anyone else. His speech was a general good-bye. He could maintain the shield of silence no longer. He refused to pretend to have any sympathies with men who could not disentangle themselves from the chifions of politics when the Judgment Day had come for their country.

He did not wait for Rhoda outside. He could not face her disappointment. He went home disgusted with the world, and sat down to a grim soliloquy by his study-window. It looked on the Kensington Road, and as he was too disturbed to do anything but let his thoughts surge, he watched the traffic. There was an unending stream of private carriages and cars, public omnibuses and tradesmen's carts. All their occupants seemed intent on pleasure or the common round. He could not

BEARDING THE LIONESS IN HER DEN

detect one movement anywhere that suggested anxiety over an invasion which might already have left the shores of Germany. Not a single soldier passed, not one messenger, flying along in a taxi regardless of police-limits. Everything was desperately ordinary and trifling.

And he, what could he do himself, in a strange country, where he held no position? Nothing, nothing, but write a letter to *The Times*, saying things which would fall upon deaf ears about the necessity of all Britons of whatever creed and class closing their ranks and presenting an united front to the common enemy. Perhaps *The Times* would not even print it, or even return it. He did not know what value they would attach to his name.

Vivien came in. She wanted particularly to know—she always wanted particularly when she wanted anything at all—where a certain ship would be by which she had posted a letter to Australia a fortnight before. Paul turned over various Post Office notices patiently and at last elicited the information for her. She hardly thanked him, and remarked nonchalantly, as she left the room, “I’m not sure that I caught that mail, only I thought I’d like to know.”

The interruption turned the current of Paul’s thoughts once more from the crisis to Rhoda. When would he see her again? Would he ever see her again?

CHAPTER XI

BEARDING THE LIONESS IN HER DEN

HE came to the conclusion that if he was to see her to close accounts, it must be at Lyonesse House. He called and asked for Rhoda; she was not in; he sat down to wait for her in the Gladstone study, as he often did. Rhoda’s political visitors were usually shown there, to be out of her mother’s way. He opened the bookcase and took out one of the later volumes of Burke, hoping to find some comforting parallel. Rhoda came in soon after. She shook hands, but the battle light was in her eyes. Neither spoke for a little time. Then she looked at him steadily and said, “I am waiting for your explanation.”

PAUL'S WIFE

"There is nothing to explain," he said, returning her gaze.

"Nothing, but that you made a fool of me, and even worse, of my father, before all our friends."

"I never mentioned either of you."

"It was not necessary to mention us. It would have been just the crowning act of indecency if you had picked us out for your attack."

"I won't pretend that I don't know what you mean," said Paul. His whole public life had been a protest against pretence. It was indignation at pretence that had precipitated this tragedy. "You mean that you were responsible for introducing me to this and the other Liberal meetings at which I have been present, that you introduced me as a Liberal, that they thought I was prepared to go the whole way with them, and that this scene at a meeting which was intended to close the ranks of the Party was an outrage."

"Exactly. You have fitted the cap to your own head."

"But you knew that I was not an 'any-price-Liberal.'"

"I refuse to recognize your insulting qualification of 'any-price-Liberal.' A Liberal is a Liberal; there is no getting away from that."

"If you mean that there is a certain class of mind which will follow the official leaders of the Liberal Party blindly, I agree with you. But there are a good many people who call themselves Liberals and at intervals vote with the Conservatives, and return the Conservative majorities in Parliament."

"Do you mean to say that . . . ?"

"I mean to say that the swinging balance in the Electorate which sometimes votes for one party and sometimes for the other consists of men who call themselves Liberals and are really the most valuable members of the electorate, because they vote by persuasion or conviction. Your Conservative never votes Liberal; the utmost he does is to absent himself intentionally, and he seldom goes even that far. Refusing to exert himself, or mere slackness, are usually his limits of defection from the leaders of his Party."

BEARDING THE LIONESS IN HER DEN

"And you are one of these Liberals who vote for the Conservatives in a crisis?"

"If by a crisis you mean a National Crisis, certainly I am. I should have voted for the Conservatives at the time of the Home Rule split. I should vote for the Conservatives now."

"You showed that pretty clearly!" she said hotly.

"I meant to show it. The littleness of the Liberals at that meeting made my blood boil. They were mere ants, concerned with an ant-heap which would be only a pimple on a village green."

"You are very candid!" she said. Her fury was concentrated and white now.

"What I want to know," he said, disregarding her interruption, "is, when are the Liberals going to find out that there are only two parties in Great Britain—Socialists and anti-Socialists? The Irish are exceptional. Their case disappears with the disappearance of party-government, as it did in Australia."

"Are you trying to draw a red herring across the trail to make me forget your behaviour?"

"Not in the least. But you have so often tried to convert me to your views that before we part I want you to understand mine."

"Proceed." The tone was one of which he would not have believed Rhoda capable.

"I can conceive nothing so wholesome for the country as a coalition between the Liberals and the Conservatives. The Liberals would wag the Conservatives as the Socialists and Irish now wag the Liberals. If the Liberals do not join the Conservatives, they will be swallowed up by the Socialist-Labour party. And every month that they delay in joining the Conservatives brings them six months nearer their extinction as a party by the Socialists."

"Very nice!"

"No, it is not very nice for you and me, who have been born Liberals, but it is horribly true. And what is more, there is not a question before the country now that could not be settled quite easily, liberally and constitutionally by a Liberal-Conservative coalition. The differences

PAUL'S WIFE

which divide them are small. Half the Liberal measures might just as appropriately have been brought forward by the Conservatives if they had been in power. Half the others would not have been brought forward by the Liberals at all, except for the Socialists and Irish, without whom they could not stay in office for a day, until they come to an arrangement with the Conservatives."

"A pretty kind of Liberal you are!"

"At any rate, the Conservatives would not blackmail us in this way. *We* should give the legislation of the coalition its character, just as the Liberal Unionists have done."

"Well, it will never happen; you can take *that* from me. The grand old banner of Liberalism will continue to float over the various forces of freedom."

He shook his head sadly. "The grand old banner of Liberalism will continue to be used as the Boers used the White Flag, unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Unless the Liberals put an end to the infamous system of Party Government which is sapping the whole life-blood of the nation by its fictions and its follies and its sacrifice of the interests of the nation to the intrigues necessary to keep a certain set of men in office."

"You mean our friends, the men whom you have just so basely betrayed!" cried Rhoda, in uncontrollable anger.

"I mean everyone who sacrifices the Army and Navy to keep himself in office; I mean everyone who opposes the commercial union of the Empire for Party Shibboleths."

"Well, that is us, at any rate. Have you any more to say? Couldn't you drag religion in?"

"Yes!" said Paul, meeting her gaze with eyes as passionate with tenderness as hers were with anger. "My religion is my Country. Good-bye, Miss St. Ives."

She refused his proffered hand. "I can't do it," she said: but the anger had gone from her voice.

HOW RHODA TOOK COURAGE

CHAPTER XII

HOW RHODA TOOK HER COURAGE IN BOTH HANDS

MANY days passed between that meeting at the Queen's Hall and the annual reception of the Royal Colonial Institute, which was this year the most brilliant in its whole career, for it was the first great function after the spectre of war had passed away.

Why war was averted was as great a mystery as ever, though all the world knew how. For the German Emperor had simply said, "I will not have war with England." He had vouchsafed no reason to his indignant counsellors. The settlement of Peace and War was his by Divine Right, and he would take no advice for which he did not ask. The German nation as a whole applauded. A large portion of it hated a war with England, and regarded it as a matter of public policy that the Emperor should not lay his cards on the table.

As Australia's most famous Prime Minister, Paul would have been the notability of the evening, even if he had not cut such a prominent figure in British politics in the last few weeks. For more than an hour he stood by the chairman, shaking hands and receiving congratulations that were gall and bitterness to him, because they recalled the incident which had spoilt his life at a moment when a fuller happiness than he had yet known was creeping over it. Yet it did him good to see old friends and feel the heartiness of their handshake—an Australian quality;—though each recalled the unfortunate incident, the constant change of speakers prevented him from having time to think about his private grief. Outwardly he showed no signs of it to-night. A leader in politics would be expected to smile on his supporters if he had just lost his father.

As one Australian after another—now a grizzled squatter who had taken up his station when Paul was a boy, and was to-day lord of twenty thousand acres; now a shopkeeper who had put by enough to take a run

PAUL'S WIFE

home ; more rarely a woman, richer or poorer—came up to shake hands and express gratification at the great part Australia's ex-Premier had taken in the crisis, Paul had the appropriate words to say to each : he had a wonderful memory. He was standing in a little square, surrounded by showcases, in the great hall of the Natural History Museum. Vicky, who had come with him, had wandered off with David Shand. Freddy had not yet returned from the Continent. Walking about with David Shand was not much more exciting than standing at her brother's side while he shook hands with a lot of people whom she did not know at all or very slightly, but it was a sort of statutory privilege that he should be her cavalier on public and political occasions. Paul thought the people would never stop coming, but after an hour or two the procession ceased, and only a few stragglers arrived. At the same time, the crowd which had been standing round looking at him and at the other well-known men who were grouped about the chairman, or identifying the arrivals as their names were shouted out by the man with the toast-master voice, melted away to the refreshment-room for ices and other non-alcoholic stimulants to conversation.

Paul began to look into the showcase immediately beside him, which contained the mosquito or gnat in all its stages. So the Mosquito was only the British Gnat writ large ! He was languidly interested in mosquitoes, about which everyone with whom he was standing had probably made some remark on every summer night spent in Australia. Suddenly he caught the sounds of the voice he knew so well responding to "What name, Miss ?"

"Miss St. Ives."

"The Honourable Miss St. Ives !" announced the possessor of the toast-master voice, priding himself on his acquaintance with the aristocracy. After shaking hands with the chairman she advanced to Paul with outstretched hand and shining eyes.

"Rhoda !" he exclaimed in a voice which betrayed his surprise. He had never called her Rhoda before. But nearly every minute of his waking day for nearly a month past the name had been beating on his brain.

HOW RHODA TOOK COURAGE

"Yes, Rhoda. Let us find a seat. I can't stand so much lately."

"Why? Have you been ill?"

"Only a nervous breakdown."

"And I have never heard of it!"

"No. We kept it out of the papers. I have been at Carbis, our old home in Cornwall, with mother. We were supposed to be there for her insomnia. She often leaves London suddenly."

"Why didn't you write and tell me . . . if you cared for me to know?"

"I couldn't. I was in bed, in a darkened room."

"Then why didn't someone else write?"

"The doctor wished you not to know."

"Wished me not to know? Why, what harm could I do?"

Rhoda looked confused. Then she stammered: "You see, my breakdown was due to politics . . . and you were connected with politics."

"But not so much as a hundred other people you know."

A natural reason which saved her from confessing the truth suggested itself. "I was taken ill directly after that scene at the Queen's Hall, so of course your name . . ."

"Yes, of course. But why didn't you write when you were better?"

"How could I, when *you* hadn't written?"

"How could *I* write after that parting?"

"I thought you couldn't, and that is why I came here to-night. I saw in the *Morning Post* that you were to be one of the principal guests."

"You came here on purpose to see me, Rhoda?"

"Yes, because I had been unjust to you. You were not a traitor, Mr. Wentworth. In those days that I was in bed in a room that was kept dark day and night, I went over and over every hour that we have spent together, and though I've moved heaven and earth to make you, I could not recall one speech, one line that you have written to say that you had joined the Liberal Party over here . . ."

PAUL'S WIFE

"You can't think what a load it takes off my mind to hear you say this!"

"It's rather tardy justice, but, Mr. Wentworth, tell me one thing—I know that you wouldn't have done it, but I should like to hear from your own lips that you hadn't joined the Conservatives before you came to our meeting."

"No, upon my honour, I hadn't, and I haven't now. I had hardly ever been to a Conservative meeting then, and certainly had not spoken at one."

"I knew it! I knew it!" she cried, and her eyes said more.

"Am I forgiven for the pain I had to give you?" His heart told him that he was, but he wanted to hear it from her dear lips.

She more than answered him, though she did not answer him directly. "I came because I could not stand being cut off any longer."

He shook his head affectionately. "You ought not to have come."

Her look told him that she had mistaken his meaning, and thought that he was referring to conventionalities. "I mean, you are not strong enough yet."

"Didn't you want me?"

"Want you? For weeks past I have felt that I had a raging sea under my heart, which only you could calm."

"Tell me that again."

He repeated it and added, "I have suffered anguish because I was away from you."

Her face showed the strength of her feelings. He thought her stress was physical, and chided her gently for coming before she was strong enough to make the effort.

"But I came for my medicine." There was a new note in the frankness of her smile. "I shall be like a giant refreshed to-morrow."

"You mean . . . ?"

"What's the good of pretending? My breakdown was entirely due to that violent separation from you. I can't bear being without you. I don't mean to say that I want to have you with me always—though I'm not

HOW RHODA TOOK COURAGE

quite sure about that," she said, with another smile, "but the idea that you had gone out of my life was not tolerable. I had to stop it, or I should have relapsed into brain fever. I made myself get well enough to come back to London to see you. The desire gave me a feverish strength."

"I wonder your doctor let you come."

"He had pretty bad misgivings, but he knows my constitution well, and he said, 'I can see that you are fretting down here, while so much is going on in London. Perhaps you had better go, if you can get your mother to take you to Barnes House, instead of Park Lane.'"

"Barnes House?"

"It's an old place near Ranelagh, belonging to my uncle. We rent it from him to stay at, if the season lasts too long into the summer, and give a garden-party there every year."

"And you are there now?"

"Yes. I am supposed to be there, in the house, now. I left mother playing Bridge at the Bastables. I left the car for her and took a taxi. When I was away from the house I found fault with the taxi, paid the man well, and got into another. I waited until the first man was out of hearing, and then told the second man to drive here."

"But won't you get into trouble for coming alone?"

"I never get into trouble. And besides, I go to public things alone sometimes. It's part of the rôle of the new political woman."

Time was too precious to waste in generalities. Suddenly he said, "You haven't told me that you have forgiven me, Rhoda." He clung to the privilege of her name.

"I'm afraid that I can forgive you anything. I'm no longer mistress of myself."

"What do you mean, Rhoda?" he asked huskily.

"Nothing, but that I need your companionship and respect your opinions. We must go back to the dear old footing, P . . ."

"Paul!"

"Paul . . . we must go back to the dear old footing. Paul—of you and Vicky coming to see me very often, and always looking out for each other at places we both go to."

PAUL'S WIFE

"I am afraid they won't be so many now, for I don't go any more to Liberal gatherings."

"We can go to Ranelagh instead." Ranelagh instead of meetings of the Washed and the Unwashed for the reform of the world!—"Barnes House is awfully convenient for that."

"I'm afraid that it will be easier for you than for me. My time, except on Sundays, will be so much taken up with the National Service League and the Universal Service League, and that sort of thing."

Her face fell.

"But I'll come as often as I can, and it's easy to let you know on the 'phone after breakfast, when I can be there. What time do you get down, now that you are on the sick list?"

"Not very early, I'm afraid. But you can ring me up any time after nine. I have breakfast sent in to me at nine, and I have a 'phone by my bedside. Putney 1250. Write the number down in your pocket-book. I found it impossible to get on without a 'phone in my room in the London season, when one stays up until all hours, and the 'phone is hard at work long before ten o'clock the next morning."

"Then we can have long talks every day, even when I can't see you, for I have a 'phone in my study."

"It won't be quite the same thing, Paul," said Rhoda, Ex-Liberal Agitator.

"Ranelagh for a choice," said Paul, falling back on the vernacular of his native country.

Rhoda was silent. There rose before her visions of the green pastures, lawns trimmed for three hundred years and more, and the still waters of Sir Philip Sidney's London Arcadia, with its temple on the island and temple on the hill, where lovers sit innocent in the eyeshot of the gay world assembled, but out of all earshot; and visions of pairs of chairs under tall horse-chestnuts, hung with a thousand lanterns of rosy or creamy blossoms, of polo waging its fierce mimic warfare in the distance, and modern Watteau scenes between the elms—all backgrounds for herself and Paul.

"You must go now, Rhoda," said Paul. "You look

CONVALESCENCE

as if you ought to have been in bed hours ago. I don't know what you'll look like to-morrow."

"To-morrow'll be all right," she said confidently.

"May I run you down to Barnes? I have my job-line car here, and the taxi man might give you trouble."

"Oh, yes, I think he might," agreed Rhoda, who would have gone in a taxi to Maidstone at midnight without a moment's hesitation, if she wanted to. All the way down to Barnes she was in wild spirits—the reaction after the black time through which she had just passed. She left Paul hardly one clear minute to think, and he had a problem very much on his mind. Was he to resume his old footing in the Lyonesses' house, or was he to treat its doors as closed to him? There was no *Via Media*.

It did not seem as if Rhoda saw her way clearly on the subject either. For she made no plans about their meeting at Barnes House, and as they were approaching it, said, "Sit back, and don't let yourself be seen when I jump out. It will be so bad for our servants."

He was a little cheeked at the pettiness of concealment, until she added, "They all know about that unlucky Queen's Hall business."

His mind was relieved. The last sentence lifted the concealment from the atmosphere of intrigue to the atmosphere of Romeo and Juliet severed by Civil War between the House of Montague and the House of Capulet.

"Call me up on the 'phone at half past nine. We *must* manage some time at Ranelagh to-morrow," said Rhoda, as they turned into the avenue of Barnes House, and as the car drew up, she whispered again, "Sit back, Paul," and quietly let herself out.

CHAPTER XIII

CONVALESCENCE

THE footman who let her in said, with the air of one who is conferring happiness, "Her ladyship is back, Miss. She's going to take a sandwich with you in the small drawing-room when you take your *s'natcho'gin*."

PAUL'S WIFE

That Lady Lyonesse idolized Rhoda was not wonderful, and Rhoda nursed an equal affection for her shrewd-tongued, self-willed mother. But on this occasion she was not sure that she felt altogether grateful to her mother for sitting up. Lady Lyonesse did not ask Rhoda where she had been, though she clearly had not come straight home. Nor did Rhoda think of concealing it.

"I looked in at the *soirée* of the Colonial Institute at the Natural History Museum."

She was startled at her Mother's immediate inference.

"To see Mr. Wentworth."

Rhoda, frank as she was, and given perfect liberty of action, said "Yes," rather haltingly. She need not have hesitated, for Lady Lyonesse's mind was moving on different premisses. Her husband was so incensed—she had never known him so incensed before—that Paul could not be asked to the house. She herself, sympathizing with Paul politically, saw his conduct in a different light, and missed his strong and interesting personality. It was natural that Rhoda, who had seen so much more of him, should miss it more. And Rhoda at the beginning of her breakdown had talked a great deal in her sleep, and the gist of her ravings had been that she had been unjust to the Right Honourable Paul Wentworth's behaviour at the Queen's Hall Meeting, because when on this, that and the other occasion—and she went over them so often—she had pressed him to declare himself in sympathy with the Liberal Party, he had consistently declared that he did not know enough about the subject to give an opinion. Time after time the sleeping girl had repeated whole conversations between herself and Paul Wentworth—entirely political. It was remarkable that the unconscious cerebration should lie, but the impression it must have conveyed to anyone was that Rhoda had no personal feelings for Paul, but was merely worrying over his political departure and her own attitude towards it.

Lady Lyonesse felt correspondingly sorry for Paul, and vexed at his absence. "It was very unfortunate," she said, referring to the episode at the Queen's Hall, and not to the *soirée* of the Colonial Institute, which was the

CONVALESCENCE

subject immediately under discussion, "but Liberals take so much for granted."

"You needn't rub it in, mother."

"It's the only satisfaction I get when I am having politics in the bosom of our family, which is fairly often."

"Oh, you're very good about it, mumsy," said Rhoda, who was experiencing a feeling of relief at the turn things had taken, and she added suddenly, "What shall you do if you meet Mr. Wentworth out—at Ranelagh, or anywhere?"

"Thank my stars! I found the society of the Wolf-in-Sheep's-clothing most stimulating."

Rhoda now wondered that her mother had not asked him to dinner already. It would have been quite in accordance with her defiant nature to do so. But Lady Lyonesse was longer-headed than her brilliant daughter or her untiring husband. She would not force a battle because she could see the seeds of disaffection at work in Lord Lyonesse's obvious mind, and they must be allowed time to develop naturally. Presently, without any words to mark the transition, her mind went back to the Colonial *soirée*.

"I am glad you looked in to see poor Mr. Wentworth. How was he?"

"He seemed very glad to see me," said Rhoda, frankly deceitful, "but I thought he looked as if he had had a lot of worry."

"I've no doubt he has—the Universal Service League have worked him for all he is worth."

Rhoda felt glad that Paul's worry had not been only due to the Universal Service League, but she did not say so. Then she was startled again.

"I hope you did not make a whole lot of appointments with Mr. Wentworth?"

She looked at her mother blankly, prepared to hear the worst.

"I mean," said Lady Lyonesse, replying to the desire for an explanation expressed on her daughter's face, "that I hope you're not going to overdo yourself by taking him to a lot of those nasty political meetings for the good of his erring soul. You're not strong enough

PAUL'S WIFE

yet, Roe." The name "Roe" meant more than anything else; it was a very pet name.

Rhoda called herself a contemptible pig for letting her mother deceive herself, but it was better for all concerned, so she said, "I told Mr. Wentworth I shouldn't go to any meetings for the present, that I should just wander about the gardens here and at Ranelagh until I felt stronger."

"Well, if he's going to see much of you, it had better be at Ranelagh," said Lady Lyonesse, falling into the open trap. "I don't want your father to be forced into meeting him yet, so he must not come here."

So Rhoda had thought, though she had not seen so far as her mother, when it was on the tip of her tongue to invite him as they motored down.

In a few minutes they went to bed. With the delights of a long talk over the 'phone before her at nine-thirty in the morning, Rhoda was anxious to get to sleep.

Over the 'phone he promised to come to tea at four o'clock—the great meeting of the day was in the evening, and the office work in connection with it was best done in the morning, prolonged until half-past two. When he got to Ranelagh he was gratified and disappointed to find her mother with Rhoda. He had pictured a *tête-à-tête*. Rhoda was surprising herself with her deceitfulness. She had meant to make her mother go, and meant not to tell him. She craved for his society, and felt the value of her mother as an ally. There was no difficulty in making her mother go to Ranelagh when there was polo. Lady Lyonesse liked watching horses better than anything in the world, except her pleasant vices, and but for the quality of the polo, she liked the off-days best.

"Bands," she said, "attract Jews. I suppose that's why they have so much about shawms and sackbuts in the Old Testament."

"Well, you fly in the ointment!" she said, as Paul came up to them, "I'm very glad to see you again."

Lady Lyonesse's family—which was also Freddy's—were extremely Low Church. As a child she had been made to read the Bible at prayers every day and go to church three times every Sunday. Reminiscences of the Bible came to her at the oddest moments, though she had never

CONVALESCENCE

entered a church, except for a wedding or a christening, since she had married Sir John St. Ives, now Lord Lyonesse, who to lax performance of Christian exercises added a willingness to disestablish the Church as an article of the Liberal Faith.

"I am very well indeed," said Paul, as in point of fact he was. His natural recuperativeness had asserted itself from the moment that he had recovered Rhoda. "How are you, Lady Lyonesse?"

"Getting gouty. It's my season for it. Wouldn't it have been awful if we had had war with Germany?"

"Appalling!"

"Queen's Hall again!" thought Paul, and was cudgelling his brains for an appropriate reply to the implied compliment, when she suddenly added, "I expect Austria would go in with Germany, and then even Marienbad would be closed to us."

Paul perceived that she was speaking from the point of view of gout, and not from the point of view of country, and again ejaculated "Appalling!"

It was the first time that Lady Lyonesse had seen Paul since he had spoken his mind at the Queen's Hall meeting, and she was immensely elated at finding him on the side of the Angels. She was a shrewd, if not a close observer of politics, and excelled in husking the Asquithian or Birrellian evasions with the bluntness—minus the oaths and indeecency—of the stable. To have Paul instead of Freddy to sharpen her wits on, in this direction, gave her great satisfaction. Paul was glad to oblige her. Stolen interviews with Rhoda might not be easy. That Lady Lyonesse should take him up hard, when he had fought with her husband's politics, was what the world expected of her. And though his desire was for *têtes-à-têtes* with Rhoda, without the presence of this talkative and engrossing old lady, it was a deep pleasure to sit with his eyes resting on Rhoda—a dream of elegance in dress and attitude, with one long smile of tenderness in her eyes. Fortunately, Lady Lyonesse did not always look at her company when she was making her points. She sometimes made a whole string of them without once raising her eyes—reserving the use of her eyes for when

PAUL'S WIFE

she was going to pass from innuendo to indignation. For Rhoda it was different. She chafed at her mother's selfishness in detaining Paul, and it was rubbing salt into the wounds that he had dealt her aspirations at the Queen's Hall to have her mother gloating over it and trying to draw him out. But there was nothing for her to do but to sit and listen. She could not but admire Paul's good taste. For though he repeated to Lady Lyonesse, with Colonial directness of speech, the points in which he found the Liberals wanting—their patriotic anæmia; their habit of appointing Ostriches to be Secretaries-of-State in the great National Departments of the Army and the Navy and the Colonies; their fondness for playing the ostrich themselves when the political or commercial existence of the Empire is threatened; their inability to rise to a crisis—he avoided all personal animosities. Nay, he made excuses for most of the men whose policy he skinned like a fishmonger. He would not have it that they were personally worse than their rivals; they were merely men incapable of lifting their eyes from the ground.

"Oh, you're too lenient, Mr. Wentworth!" Lady Lyonesse would protest. "They're not *mugs*, they're *cracksmen*!" An admiration for the younger du Maurier had inspired her with a taste for detective stories.

Paul would not agree. He had seen a good deal of these men in private life, and understood political exigencies, though he was out of Australian politics to-day, because he refused to bow the knee to Baal himself. Rhoda took no part in the dialogue, but she listened, and there was no anger in her eyes.

When Lady Lyonesse had done dishing up her enemies, she remembered that she was a mother, and began to examine Rhoda—the destined-for-an-important-marriage Rhoda, whom, speaking mostly from this point of view, she had always pronounced such a good girl. Her shrewd stableman's eye told her at a glance that all was not well with the State of Denmark. Rhoda was about to fall in love with Paul Wentworth—if, indeed, she had not fallen already. That point could easily be cleared up, and might explain Rhoda's illness. Nervous

CONVALESCENCE

break-downs were not in Rhoda's line. "Politics have never worried her," said Lady Lyonesse to herself. "She's too cocksure about *them*."

"Mr. Wentworth, will you walk Rhoda up and down? She needs exercising. I can't get her to go, and I can't take her with my gout coming on."

She did not miss the look of relief on Rhoda's face, and settled down to watch them as they passed to and fro, and was convinced that she was right. The spring was returning to Rhoda's gait, and she had seldom seen her so animated, though for a month past she had lived in a state of gentle depression which, at the best, could be put down to the political catastrophe.

Lady Lyonesse was not alarmed at the discovery. "She can't marry him," she said to herself, and she trusted that it might be only hero-worship. It would be all right if it stopped there, and it would be good for England, in any case, because it would put an end to her own *salons* at Lyonesse House, an idea at which she smiled so grimly that Rhoda started. Lady Lyonesse did not wish to startle Rhoda. This was the doctor she needed, so she beamed on Paul. Besides which, it was much better to keep the affair under her own eye, and she meant to keep a very sharp look-out on Paul. She watched them like a cat as they passed up and down. They did not pay any attention to the polo, which was a bad sign, and they zigzagged a good deal. But the scraps of conversation which she caught as they passed, and she had very sharp ears, were about Italy—questions from Paul and disquisitions from Rhoda, about Italy, chiefly about Art and other impersonal subjects.

Obviously it was hero-worship, and Rhoda was showing off before her hero—unless Italy represented a desperate effort to keep off politics. The point was, how much love was there mixed up with it? And would it prevent Rhoda from accepting an offer of marriage, if the right man came along? Even if she married at once, Rhoda would be marrying late for a girl in her position, though this was not so important as it might have been, in view of the fact that a girl with Rhoda's expectations could never lack a husband of the requisite position, unless she

PAUL'S WIFE

desired to. The holding-back had been on her side. The suitors whose personality appealed to her had been Conservatives, and she would not marry a political enemy.

With Paul's attitude Lady Lyonesse was completely satisfied. It was of a detached, chivalric, eye-worshipping nature. It suggested one of the Platonic episodes in which great men and fair girls have played their dignified parts right through history. Nor was she too optimistic. In Rhoda's gracious and vivacious presence Paul was completely happy. His worship was one of eye and intellect. He admired her appearance immensely; her expression, sympathetic to all, but free from any desire to attract the opposite sex, was a great relief after his wife's petulance, and she was a good talker and listener. He had no wish to pay compliments to her charms, or to say anything of a private nature to her. He wanted nothing better than that she should wax enthusiastic over Italy, or let him see in any other way how nearly she approached the ideal of the Italian Renaissance which she described—the highly-trained mind in the beautiful and highly-trained body, placed before all other conceptions of worldly good by the possessors of rank and wealth. By such arts Mantua and Ferrara towered to Heaven.

As Lady Lyonesse saw their respect for each other, their admiration for each other's great qualities, she was not so sure of its being a good thing that Paul was married. Rumour credited him with being very wealthy—and therefore no adventurer—and a man who was a Privy Councillor, and had been the most famous Prime Minister of Australia, and was not yet fifty years old, was, even to her exclusive and Conservative mind, not altogether inferior to a nobleman—unless he was a very distinguished nobleman, or came of a very illustrious family—for a husband. But Paul was married, and his wife was still in the heyday of her vigour. So the question of their marriage plainly did not arise. The question stood at this, was it wise to permit such a friendship and companionship between a beautiful and attractive girl, of unusual gifts and very unusual bringing-up, and a man whose personality and gift for ruling his fellow-

CONVALESCENCE

creatures had dominated a whole continent of adventurous and independent Colonials, who were not to be won and ruled in any other way ?

This Lady Lyonesse told herself that she must judge. For to-day she might allow herself happiness in having found the cure for Rhoda's break-down—a thing so unprecedented that it had frightened her. She had her reward. For every time they passed the mother's fond eye fancied that it could detect fresh life in Rhoda's movements. Other people put a different interpretation on the duet to which Lady Lyonesse was an occasional chorus. They anticipated seeing in the morning papers news of Paul's *rapprochement* to the Liberals. The message the duet had for them was that Rhoda was putting forth all her blandishments, and that Paul had fallen a victim.

As the blood ran stronger in Rhoda's veins her thoughts turned to sport. "Oh, Paul, I must look at the polo ! Remember that the Old Etonians are playing again to-day."

Judging on general principles, Paul thought that Old Etonians ought to play well, but the name had no suggestion of dashing Grenfells or stone-wall Roxburghs for him. He was soon wrapt in admiration of the fine horsemanship and the noble animals, though he could not, like Rhoda, understand the beauty of the players' driving, and the skill with which, having no offside now to hamper them, they 'fed' their forwards. So they watched, until her eye happened to fall on the great man in a brown study of horseflesh. There was a half-amused, half-tender look in it.

"Where are you going to speak to-night, Paul ?"

"At the reception Mr. St. Barbe is giving to the Universal Service League at the 'Ritz.'"

"Why is he giving it there ?"

"To collect workers for it among Society people, I suppose. There are to be speeches first, to show its absolute necessity and the lines on which we propose to work it, and then there is to be a *soirée*, at which people can come to the organizers and ask questions and offer their help as canvassers."

PAUL'S WIFE

"I hope the Conservatives will find you as difficult to convert as I did."

"This is not a Conservative show. It is . . ."

"You mean that Liberal Saints who are willing to present themselves will be welcome?"

"Everyone will be welcome. And, by Jove, I must be off!" he said, catching sight of the clock. "I ought to have gone a quarter of an hour ago, if the St. Barbes are punctual people."

"Everybody's a quarter of an hour late for dinner."

"Another of London's foolish follies. It would be so much nicer if the guests arrived a quarter of an hour early, so as to be sure of making each other's acquaintance before dinner. You never make anybody's acquaintance after dinner, unless there is a reception to follow it."

"Run along, Paul. Don't be such an awful Radical! I suppose it's a term of abuse with you now!" she said, as a parting shot.

"Oh, where's your mother?" he said desperately. He was getting quite anxious about the time.

"I'll say good-bye to her for you."

But Paul was punctilious, and would hunt until they found Lady Lyonesse, examining the polo remounts, which were waiting for their masters under the big horse-chestnut by the fifth tee. Paul bade her a flying good-bye, and strode up the lawn with his long legs as if he had settled down to his stride in a walking race.

"Why's he in such a hurry, Rhoda?"

"He's dining with the St. Barbes at the 'Ritz,' for their Universal Service League *soirée*."

CHAPTER XIV

UNIVERSAL SERVICE

LORD LYONESSE did not return to dinner, and Rhoda was very silent during the meal. Her mother made several unsuccessful attempts to draw her out, to see if she had overdone herself. She protested that there was nothing the matter with her, that she simply did not feel inclined to talk, and must go to bed early. This her

UNIVERSAL SERVICE

mother thought frankly the worst possible sign, but before she gave in she drew a bow at a venture.

"Well, if you're going to bed early, I shall order the car and go to the Universal Service *soirée*."

"Oh, Mother, take me with you!" cried Rhoda, falling into the trap without any regard for dissimulation.

"Well, if that's all there is the matter with you, I don't think it will do your health any harm to come." She emphasized the word "health," but Rhoda was too happy to listen for *nuances*.

* * * * *

"Why were you so anxious to come, Rhoda?" asked her mother, as the car flew down the mile stretch of empty road between the blossoming chestnuts and laburnums at Castelnau.

"I wanted to hear Mr. Wentworth speak again."

"Is he so much better than other people?"

"No better—not so good as many of them as a speaker—but he is so sincere."

"Not like some Prime Ministers!" said Lady Lyonesse enigmatically.

Rhoda did not take up the challenge, but proceeded, "And I want to hear him when he is not hampered by . . . his obligations to his audience."

She did not know the stimulating effect that heckling had on him. But she was not thinking of that; she wanted to hear him without being pained for the feelings of her friends. Something told her that if her Radical friends were right, neither she nor England would have been in the very pleasant positions they were occupying; that she, Rhoda St. Ives, was the friend of all the great men in the Liberal Party and that great Radical events took place at Lyonesse House, because of the wealth and honour they had inherited from a line of knightly ancestors going back to Norman times, combined with an ability to catch on to popular movements. These were her mother's constant jibes, but Rhoda had never taken them seriously until she heard Paul at the Queen's Hall knocking down the Liberal idols like ninepins. Her blood had boiled as he was speaking. She had

PAUL'S WIFE

longed to be on her feet, giving the lie to everything he said. But there were some points on which he could hardly be wrong, such as the true feeling in the Colonies towards the Liberals, and yet what he said on them seemed as wrong to her as the rest. She had read what *The Times* had to say about his speech, and when she had read that, sent out for all the daily papers.

The Liberal papers had attacked him violently. They tore various parts of his speech to pieces, but, except the *Daily Chronicle*, they avoided the direct issue about the Colonies, and they gave force to what he had said about preparation to resist Germany, by saying that the Government meant to do all that he suggested and a great deal more, if he had never opened his mouth. They made out, in fact, that the meeting in the Queen's Hall had really been called for this object, and had devoted itself to it. *The Chronicle* said that Paul's speech was an outrage, but that the Party must set its house in order. For the first time Rhoda's faith in the Party Organs was shaken. They did not represent the tenour of the meeting. They said it was a great patriotic gathering, earnest in its desire to leave no stone unturned for the defence of our hearths and homes, and Paul was a disappointed man who had chosen this singularly unbecoming occasion to vent his spleen.

Then she turned to the Unionist papers. They all used the word Balaam, sometimes in their headings. They exaggerated, too, but they had a better case. It suited them to give the real tenour of events, the real tenour of Paul's speech, and Rhoda, for all her bias, recognized that their version was more correct, and wished that she had not dismissed Paul so summarily.

Her going to the Universal Service Meeting was not only due to her personal feelings. She really wished to hear Paul set forth his views again as much as she longed to be in his presence, listening to the sound of his voice.

Lady Lyonesse had no fears for the physical results of going to the meeting upon Rhoda. The question was, was it safe to indulge this moral dram-drinking, where the object of her daughter's enthusiasm was a man who could hardly by any possibility ever become her husband ?

UNIVERSAL SERVICE

She ended by deciding in accordance with her own desires. She wanted to hear the political *enfant terrible* who had kicked over the pot at the Queen's Hall meeting. So she decided to risk the consequences for Rhoda, who, after all, had never allowed her feelings to get the better of her. She ordered the car, and hurried through their dinner and flew up to town.

* * * * *

When they got into the big hall at the "Ritz" where the reception was being held, they were asked for their tickets; they had none, of course, and there was a momentary difficulty about their getting in, but one of the Conservative whips arrived at the same time and hurrying on, flew back with the Organizing Secretary to pass them in. His professional instincts told him the value of having a bright particular star of the opposite side like Rhoda St. Ives in the room. So she found herself with her mother right under the platform, as she had been at the Queen's Hall on that disastrous occasion. She looked round the hall. Undoubtedly the assemblage was not of the same calibre as the audience at the Queen's Hall had been. Almost every person at the "Scribes and Pharisees'" meeting had been an active political worker—bristling with energy in every case, the chosen delegate of ardent organizations in many cases. Intelligence or fanaticism was on every face, though there was hardly a face you would have picked out for knightliness in an audience which was as full of knights as Henry V.'s army at Agincourt.

Here, at the "Ritz," the audience was largely made up of people whose enthusiasm outran their energy, and even their intelligence, people who had healthy bodies and hearts in the right place, and power from their position in the world to influence others, but little else except that they loved their country like they loved their own lands. Among them was a good percentage of the type which fights for its country in all lands—men with high breeding and faces that were full of the pride of courage and out-door sport—the type of the knights of Agincourt, not the legion of honour whose exploits have been in trade,

PAUL'S WIFE

charity and civic office. John St. Barbe himself, who was addressing the meeting, was the descendant of a knight who had fought under Henry V. and held the same lands which had furnished his ancestor with his following of men-at-arms. He looked it. He was not a man of robust physique, but his long limbs and loose-jointed body were capable of feats not only of activity but of endurance. His blue eyes, high cheek-bones and nose with its slender, high bridge, bespoke courage, but they were more eloquent of refinement and spotless honour. You knew as soon as you set eyes on him that he would do the chivalrous thing, whatever the cost. What he was saying now had no illumination in it beyond the shining fire of patriotism which inspired it. "England needs every man who can hold a rifle to guard her honour and her homes!" That was the effect of what he said. He had fought for England himself, as all his fathers had fought for her, except when the Lord had sent them peace in their time. "Unfortunately I have only one son," he said. "I sent him out to Africa in the war—and if I had more sons of the fighting age, I would have sent them, every one. I only regret that I am such a bad citizen as not to have them. A man should pay his tribute to his country in sons to fight for her." Though John St. Barbe had not remained long enough to rise to the rank of Captain in the dashing regiment in which his son now served, it had been his luck to march with Roberts to Candahar, and looking death in the face had left a serious stamp on his mind which came out on occasions like the present. His last sentences were: "Death takes his tithe as the price of Empire, but this is the form of conscription which all of us owe to the land that gave us birth—the land which has filled the world with the echoes of her voice."

The seeds of his address sank into Rhoda's heart. There was not one word of the eternal talk about rights. What a much sweeter savour there was about duty and sacrifice! But rights were implied, the rights of the Country. Here was a new Fifth Commandment: "Honour thy Fatherland and thy Mother Country that its days may be long in the world."

UNIVERSAL SERVICE

When he sat down, Paul rose. Rhoda hoped that she would be forgiven for being less moved by Paul's plain, practical patriotism, when he rose to unfold the system adopted by Australia, the first British community that ever undertook Universal Service. But as Paul warmed to his subject and compared Governments that created no adequate force for the guarding of England, though they had the finest population in the world for the manufacture of soldiers and sailors, to the steward who buried his talent in a napkin, she felt deeply moved by his simplicity and sincerity.

"We are beginning to hear sense at last!" said her mother. "That invasion-scare brought it home to us."

"Shall you do anything?"

"Yes, I shall send them five pounds."

Paul was so intent with the meeting that he did not see Rhoda until the speaking was over and the speakers came down into the hall to have intending workers introduced to them. Then suddenly the whole scene was transfigured for him by a light touch on his elbow. For a moment he only saw Lady Lyonesse; then he became aware that Rhoda was beside her, Rhoda, who was to go to no public meetings.

"You at the U.S.L. meeting, Rhoda!"

"You're responsible," said Lady Lyonesse. "Rhoda, as you call her . . ."

"I know I oughtn't to!"

"It doesn't matter, perhaps. You're twice her age."

"You're vexed?"

"No, I don't think so. I was only rather surprised."

"Miss St. Ives."

"Go on calling her Rhoda!" said Lady Lyonesse, almost testily. "You'd better do it before my face as well as behind my back."

"I know that you're annoyed."

"Really I am not. Call her what you like. She's a very small affair in a life like yours."

"Rub it in, Mother!"

"No, I won't. I can see how much he thinks of you. But be careful. Appearances often count for more than realities."

PAUL'S WIFE

At this moment John St. Barbe, who, being connected with her by marriage, was aware that Lady Lyonesse did not share her husband's opinions, came up to them.

"May I put you down as a patroness of the Universal Service League, Caroline?"

"I don't think, Saint, that an anti-suffragette like me has any right to go against her husband."

"Well, then, you must convert your husband, and that will do more good than becoming a patroness. Won't you join us, Roe?" pleaded John St. Barbe.

"I don't see how I can, Cousin John. It's so dead in the teeth of all I have been preaching for years." He felt that it was so, and forbore to utter one word to press her.

"You make her!" said Lady Lyonesse to Paul maliciously.

"It wouldn't be fair to worry her, when she has been good enough to come here to judge for herself," he replied.

As John St. Barbe was talking to Lady Lyonesse, Paul and Rhoda drifted a few yards away. As soon as they were out of earshot, she said, "Put the points before me fairly, Paul. I'll give you leave to convert me if you can. This isn't politics—it's Country."

"Go and do your duty, Mr. Wentworth, and leave that wicked Radical to me!" called out Lady Lyonesse, as John St. Barbe left her.

"I'm trying to convert Rhoda."

"As she seems to be the only sinner in the room, I suppose there'll be more joy in heaven over what you do with her than what you do with ninety and nine Conservatives who have not sinned!" Then she held her tongue, perceiving that Paul really was trying to convert Rhoda.

Rhoda was visibly impressed by his earnestness, and was so in favour of physical training and so accustomed to the idea of interference with the liberty of the subject that she could have found plenty of reasons for supporting the project if Lord Haldane had introduced it, and Mr. Lloyd George had given it his blessing. Now she said slowly, "I see your idea of Country, but I only see one way that I can serve it, and that is by having my defec-

UNIVERSAL SERVICE

tion from the Party placarded on the hoardings. That makes me feel like Cleopatra when Augustus offered her terms. The expressed terms were good enough; the unexpressed term was that she should be paraded in fetters in his triumph. I share Cleopatra's objection."

"And you think that I should like to parade you as . . ."

"A turncoat? No, Paul, I don't. But what other use am I?"

"I'll tell you. First of all, don't join the League. We don't want to parade you, and you can do more for the country if you don't."

"Why?"

"Because, if you do, you will cut yourself off from all your political associates, except the few who cross the Rubicon with you. We want no Party triumphs. We want to convert the voters who hold the balance. They don't know their own minds; we want to infect the whole male population of the country with the enthusiasm of the Boy Scouts."

"Paul, you are trying to let me down easily."

"On the contrary, I want you to work your hardest. Go among the people like myself whom you were trying until the day of your illness to carry with you to the extreme wing of the Party, and when they discuss Universal Service, move their minds towards it, instead of against it. Throw in your weight with the Moderates, instead of the Extremists. If you can capture the Extremists, so much the better. But don't leave your Party. We want to keep the Universal Service League out of Party politics."

"It is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle," said Rhoda, repeating one of her mother's favourite phrases. "The idea of any patriotism but Party discipline is odious to these people."

"I don't see how they can stand Party discipline."

"Because the essence of Radical discipline is that the Party should agree what abuses are to be attacked, and that then the individuals who compose the Party should be at liberty to set about the destruction of the Bastille in their own way. There need be no uniforms and no

PAUL'S WIFE

officers talking about the rules of war. Pikes and caps of liberty and torches have done more than armies in securing the liberties of the world. We are like the Nonconformists ; we make use of the forces of Nature, not by controlling, but by directing. We are carried to Victory on the wave of the uncontrolled forces. In a word, we are *proscribers*."

"And the populace carries out the proscription in the usual way! Yes, I think that is a very fair way of putting it."

"I shouldn't have put it that way until you taught me to look with your eyes."

"Until I forced self-examination on you."

"That's a nicer way of putting it. Now, having captured an important Liberal lady, go and get promises to open branches of the U.S.L. from the *Primrose Dames of Dalliance*!" The sarcasm acted as a sort of safety-valve.

When she went back she found her mother talking to John St. Barbe. As soon as he had finished his conversation with Lady Lyonesse, he turned to her and said, "I wish we had your sympathies, Roc."

"You have, only you mustn't say so."

"Of course I shan't, until I have your permission, but I wish we could have your help in some way ; you are such a magnificent worker. Why not form a Liberal U.S.L. ?"

"It is in the nature of things, Cousin John, that on the Liberal side the real leaders should be the Party and should slight the Ministers who carry out their behests. Otherwise you would not have the spectacle which History solemnly repeats at ever-shortening intervals, of Liberal leaders—the Liberal leaders in the Cabinet and in the country—going over to the other side, like Burke and the Duke of Portland, Chamberlain and the Duke of Devonshire. If these men could have leavened their Party, they would have stayed in it. But that is impossible ; they can only collect the Liberal forces of reaction and, leading them over, leaven the Conservatives. The people who join the U.S.L. will lose their places as Liberals."

"Try and prove your own words false. No—I must

RHODA MARKS TIME

not say that ; it is not polite. Try and prove that these people are better than you thought them."

"I will."

"Mum's the word for me, then. I wish you luck."

For the first time Rhoda St. Ives and John St. Barbe were marching shoulder to shoulder. The Radical papers of the next morning said that the Honourable Rhoda St. Ives accompanied her mother, Lady Lyonesse, to the *soirée* of the Universal Service League at the Ritz Hotel, but sturdily rejected all overtures from the U.S. Leaguers, and no doubt only went to arm herself with arguments against the movement.

CHAPTER XV

RHODA MARKS TIME

THE German scare was over, and with it any chance of passing an Act of Parliament to introduce Universal Service. The Conservative Party endorsed it, but they showed no signs of making it one of the chief planks of their programme. They were, as usual, sitting on the fence, watching the hounds. But a good many of the Country Conservatives, like John St. Barbe, to their honour, fought tooth and nail for what they perhaps no more than other Conservatives considered essential to the survival of the Empire. Paul, with his fiery eloquence and his Colonial record, was their right-hand man. Private persons joined the Universal Service League by thousands and scores of thousands, and attended its meetings, but they did not use the iron hand of the Women Suffragists, so they could not make the Conservative leaders come down from the fence, and not being made a cry, the question stood in danger of being relegated to the pigeon-holes of abstract resolutions—until the U.S.L. could seat enough members to frighten the leaders by sulking in Parliament.

It must be understood that the Conservative leaders were so far from placing any obstacles in the way of Universal Service that they gave it their blessing and found constituencies for the Leaguers, who were strong

PAUL'S WIFE

enough to fight a doubtful seat, to contest at the General Election, which many prophesied in the autumn. Paul, whose presence in Parliament was so desirable, was offered a fairly safe Unionist seat, but preferred to fight a great London constituency which had never yet returned a Conservative.

It was uphill work. First-rate speaker as he was for Universal Service League meetings, where the people whom he was addressing, in the nature of things, took some interest in the subject, even if they were hostile or not convinced, he frankly did not understand the mind of the British Socialist voter, that blind Samson who is for ever trying to pull the Empire down, like the Philistine Temple, on his own head, in order to wreak his spite on his enemies. The Australian working-man voter, whether pro-Labour or anti-Labour, is a keen politician and uses his intelligence, though it may be in a way which is disastrous to everyone who has the smallest investment in the country. But the British voter in Socialist strongholds does not use his intelligence much more than the Irish voter, who untruthfully claims to be illiterate in order that the priest may cast his vote for him. When either shows any signs of exercising it at a meeting which he attends to hear the questions affecting his country discussed, stalwarts are at hand who break the meeting up. No question can be brought home to his notice except by canvassing his wife—the strongest possible argument in favour of giving women the vote.

But Paul at his meetings won the admiration of the Conservative Office, for he was addressing more than ordinarily rough and noisy and hostile crowds, and he made them listen to what he had to say, though he made no proportionate number of converts. To make up for this, he slaved at house-to-house visitation, for which he was not fitted. He was not sufficiently patient in trying to combat the prejudices of which bovine people make a cud. But he worked at his visitations so resolutely that they took up all his time.

Rhoda missed him terribly. He could see hardly anything of her now, while before he began work on his constituency he had given her much of his day. For he

RHODA MARKS TIME

had talked to her until neither of them had any more to say over the 'phone in the morning, before he went to the U.S. League office, and before or after his meetings he had contrived to find a long time in the afternoon or evening for lounging about the gardens at Ranelagh.

All through his married life his nature had been starved for want of sympathetic companionship. He had enjoyed no home life—sisters do not count—and had given all his time to working at Politics and the Bar, as another man might have worked in building up a grocery business, giving every spare minute to pushing forward some detail. At last, in the fulness of time, he had found the woman who had been created to fill his life, and he was like Noah when the windows of heaven were opened and the great rains fell. His whole world was filled with a flood of emotions and confidences. At last he spoke of himself, freely and without reserve. He gave the history of the ambitions which had formed the programme of his life, and the marvellous way in which his ships had come home to the haven under the hill. So few had been wrecked, except the ship of marriage. He told Rhoda as he had never told any human being of the emotions he had felt when this or the other effort was crowned with triumphant success or had just failed, like a tree crowned with rich foliage whose fruit has shrivelled. He confessed to her his desires, even his vanities. He had the talks which give rest and content, though they appear to be mere waste of time. And Rhoda gave herself up completely to be listener, guide and philosopher. He used to call her his Egeria.

Her complete abandonment of political work, her indolent disregard of Society pleasures, were put down to the doctor's orders, and his constant presence in her company was put down to his contrition for causing her breakdown by his violent denunciation at the Queen's Hall of the eminent politicians and the Party organizations to which she had introduced him. No scandal attached itself to their names. Lady Lyonesse was often with them, and admitted Paul to an intimacy she had never been known to extend to any new politician taken up by her husband. And Rhoda for years past had been in the

PAUL'S WIFE

habit of running people in whom she was interested politically, without allowing her heart to be touched. Her being a law to herself had been so free from bad results that people had ceased to wonder what the result of any fresh eccentricity would be.

Suddenly the incessant companionship with Paul had ceased, because he was once more in regular harness, wooing a constituency. Every morning, it was true, for the best part of an hour he told her the results of the previous day's work, without attempting to conceal their meagreness, and sketched out his hopes and his programme for that day. But his visits to Ranelagh became increasingly fewer. To see him, Rhoda had to catch him after a meeting, and then perhaps she could only get anything of his society by accompanying him in his car while he was in transit, or going home with him to Kensington Gore, if for once in a way he had the leisure.

But that had one great drawback. Vicky welcomed her warmly, and then made herself scarce unless she was requested to stay. But unfortunately she had a warmer welcome than she desired from another direction. One of Vivien's eccentricities which was most difficult to explain was that if Paul, whom on ordinary occasions she hardly saw except at meals, took a great fancy to anyone, Vivien invariably shared his liking, and shared it honestly. It was no pretence, designed to give her more of Paul's company, or to give herself the power of checkmating him. It was more in the nature of a conversion, without any desire or consciousness on either side. The net result was that Vivien could not tear herself from Rhoda's side, when she knew that Rhoda was in the house. The disadvantage of this was double. Charming as Vivien made herself to both Rhoda and Paul, Rhoda went there to have a quiet talk—or even to sit without words—with Paul, and this she could not get. Also, Vivien's affection heaped coals of fire on her head, when she had gone there for the companionship of Vivien's husband.

That she did not have another relapse was due entirely to the telephone. On that, before Paul permitted himself to go out in the morning, they had the intercourse of

RHODA MARKS TIME

intellects and sympathies which had become the main-spring of their lives. None the less, for the first time in her life, except during that awful month in Cornwall, Rhoda had empty hours, even hours in which she was *ennuyée*. It might have been better for her to return to Lyonesse House. But that was a step she was not prepared to take, as it would mean encroachments on her time, and though her time was empty, she wished to keep it her own, in case appointments arose, which so seldom did arise. At Lyonesse House she would have been more at the mercy of callers, and less able to excuse herself from accepting invitations. At Barnes she could still protest herself an invalid, and it was off the track of her friends when they were on their social cruises. There she could adapt her movements to Paul's. And it was not prohibitively far out, for when the road was clear at night, Barnes House was only twenty minutes by ear from Lyonesse House. Lady Lyonesse did not mind the comparative absence from Town. Society, beyond the interchange of constant hospitalities with her own little circle of intimates, frankly bored her. And they came to her and she went to them almost as much as if she had been at her town house.

Lord Lyonesse sometimes slept at one house and sometimes at the other. That the establishment—including the impeccable chef—was at Barnes did not trouble him. He preferred lunching and dining—and lunching and dining his friends—at clubs and restaurants. He told the head waiter what he wanted, and as expense was no object, everything was very well done. And he could leave his troubles at home. It was no light thing for him to have the political habits of years ruined by Paul Wentworth's violent speech at the Queen's Hall; to have Rhoda, his ally in so many campaigns, break down under the resulting stress—though happily she was better now—and worst of all, to be driven out of his political Eden by the Angel of Conscience with a flaming sword. All was not well in the best of possible worlds. All, in fact, depended on the Navy not being surprised. He thought Paul had proved his case about the Army. It looked as if England had only escaped destruction by

PAUL'S WIFE

the personal intervention of the German Emperor. And yet his political associates had recommenced burying their ostrich-heads in the sand with renewed ardour. For the moment he could not see beyond the writing on the wall about the National Defences, to which Belshazzar—the Liberal Party—was paying no heed. The great questions beyond, the Veto, Home Rule, the Reform of the Lords, Tariff Reform, Reciprocity with the Colonies, all faded into the background when nothing was being done to escape from the puerility of our Army system.

He felt so uncertain about Politics altogether that he was almost thankful that Rhoda was debarred from political activities by illness. For to have held their receptions and to have attended the receptions which they were in the habit of attending, would have brought them into contact with members of their Party to whom the course pursued by the Liberal Leaders at the Queen's Hall meeting represented the highest wisdom. He was so disturbed in his mind that he shrank from discussing the matter even with Rhoda, who, he feared from the very strong words she used about Paul's speech at the Queen's Hall, would take the orthodox Liberal attitude. He fortunately had precedents for absenting himself from political circles, for every now and then he got tired of politics, and since he was of no real importance in the Liberal Councils, except as being the most liberal entertainer in the party, the leaders always smiled indulgently when he took a well-earned rest, and occupied himself as a member of the Jockey Club, a founder of Brooklands, and a member of the committee of the Marylebone Club might be expected to occupy himself. Lady Lyonesse was always willing to go to races, whether of horses or automobiles, and Rhoda's absence from his side created no comment, because she had hardly been seen in public since her illness.

The set, who attended the receptions of Lyonesse House regularly, missed its flesh-pots, and left cards inquiring after Rhoda's health. But, speaking in general, the closing of the doors of the most hospitable great house in London made hardly a ripple in the stream. In London more than any other place in the world, people mind

RHODA MARKS TIME

their own business, especially in the sporting circles in which Lord Lyonesse was taking his retreat, and where his politics were well known but were not the politics of the majority of the people he was meeting. Had the Jarretts and Spratts enjoyed admission to those exalted circles, they would doubtless have taxed him with lukewarmness, if not backsliding, but as things went, Lord Lyonesse had not to run the gauntlet of the Liberal watch-dogs; he had simply to combat his own sense of loneliness by going through the routine of pastimes for a man of his station, which he was in the habit of neglecting.

Rhoda did not accompany them anywhere, because she wished to keep herself free in case there should be one of the opportunities of meeting Paul which were growing increasingly rare. Her friends of her own age were few, since for some years past she had been devoting herself to political work, so when her mother went off to Brooklands or some race-meeting, she was left a good deal to her own society. In these long hours Paul's words sunk deep into her soul. He had been drawing a parallel between the philosophizing nobles of the age before the Revolution in France—the amateur Republicans who had inflamed the agitation with their rhodomontades about Liberty, and done nothing to correct the abuses which were drowned in a sea of blood, and the moderate English Liberals, whose interests and opinions are almost identical with those of the Unionists, but who, under the spell of the name *Liberal*, help the Extremists to pass legislation of which they disapprove.

In these long hours she weighed Paul's propaganda in her mind. He had laid them before her categorically; he had made no attempt to convert her. But he told her so much about his work in his constituency—the opposition of the electors to his views and how he battled with it—that she knew by heart the policy he was advocating. Briefly he put the rights of the Country before the rights of the various groups of individuals who were clamouring for their advancement at the cost of the Country, and present possessors. For the present possessors she cared little, albeit her father was a very prominent representative of them. She was

PAUL'S WIFE

willing to be taxed and super-taxed for the reckless multipliers of pauper families. But the idea of Country was not one that was discussed at the political assemblages in which she had taken so active a part. There they talked about the People, in contradistinction to the Nation, as if nationality was an infamous idea, and as if the people consisted only of the so-called working-classes, to the exclusion not only of the aristocracy, but of all who earn their daily bread with their brains instead of their hands. If England was mentioned at all, it was generally in declaiming against iniquities perpetrated in her name. The Empire was anathema.

In Paul's speeches the defence of Great Britain, the heart of the Empire, from invasion, came first, and the solidification of the British Empire by improved commercial relations came second. To questions of domestic policy and of political economy he gave less attention. In his opinion, such matters as Old Age Pensions and National Insurance might be safely entrusted to either Party.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT HAPPENED AT A SURREYSIDE ELECTION MEETING

IN the morose building which had once endeavoured to capture the public with cinematographs of comic burglars, Paul, with a local alderman as chairman, was endeavouring to inspire a couple of hundred Surreysiders with the ambition to become a nation-in-arms by returning to power a party pledged to place themselves and their sons under a law of Universal Service. Surreyside did not perfectly understand the proposal, but as far as it apprehended it was dead against it. It was not terrified of a German invasion, because there did not appear to be anything in Surreyside worthy of an invader's attention. Even Dewar's Whiskey tower was outside of the borough limits.

Paul had made his speech with about the usual amount of success and failure, when a note was handed up to the chairman to ask if a lady might address the meeting. A cordial answer was returned, and a minute afterwards

A SURREYSIDE ELECTION MEETING

Paul was electrified by the apparition of Rhoda. The chairman spoke in the strongest manner to say how welcome her support was at such a crisis, but her name, after all these years of hard political work, appeared to convey nothing to the audience. She was received with stony silence, and without more ado stepped forward and addressed the meeting. In sentences delivered with the clear and finished elocution which women achieve so much more frequently than men, Rhoda said that she had been a life-long Liberal and was the daughter of a life-long Liberal, who had worked hard for the Cause. But when it came to the question of arming the country against the imminent danger of invasion and the Party refused to raise its hand, she had to remember that she was not only the daughter of the Sir John St. Ives, raised by the Liberal Premier to the Barony of Lyonesse, but also the descendant of another Sir John Ives, who raised a company of Cornish men-at-arms that took part in the Battle of Crécy. Liberals are apt to talk about their ancestors when they have any. Now no one would do their service under baron or knight, though two Scottish chiefs did raise regiments of horse in the Boer War. But if the British Empire was to survive, they must all of them agree to serve their country against invasion, with their own bodies, while the vigour of manhood lasted, and with the bodies of their sons as they grew to manhood. All other systems had been tried and found wanting, notably the Territorial system, and there was nothing for it but that Englishmen, like the Swiss and Norwegians, should make this sacrifice of personal convenience. Since the Government pooh-poohed the necessity of providing against the national peril, there was nothing to do but to drive them out of office.

The speech fell on deaf ears. Most of the audience had never heard of Crécy. Few of those who had heard the name understood the reference to her ancestor having raised his quota of men to fight in it. The one thing they did understand was that they were asked to condemn themselves to compulsory military service, and the idea was an unpopular one. England meant nothing to them, except in connection with International Football matches.

PAUL'S WIFE

But though the cheap Surrey suburb was unaffected by her speech, her appearance in that hall had a profound effect on the country.

Rhoda was cruelly hurt and humiliated by the stony way in which the audience received her speech. They were, with the exception of a few people of the better class, who had been the promoters of the meeting, frankly not interested, and the audiences she had been in the habit of addressing, any-price-Liberals listening to the unbridled suggestions of an irresponsible enthusiast, had always cheered her charmingly-mouthed phrases to the echo. She was humiliated for her own sake, and disappointed for Paul's. The meeting did not even pass a vote of confidence; it fizzled out. Paul was not surprised at her failure. He had been addressing a good many meetings in that Surrey suburb, and had met with no real hearty response except when he raised the issue of Tariff Reform. There were thinking working men who could see for themselves that all was not well with British trade, that foreign produce and products were killing the British producer and manufacturer, and occasionally they made themselves felt at his meetings. Except for this there had been no encouraging symptoms yet.

In spite of her failure he felt strangely elated. To have Rhoda at his side, Rhoda fighting for him in his campaign, was beyond his wildest dream, even if her help brought no practical result. As he motored her back to Barnes he poured out his heart to her. Of love he said actually nothing; of love-words he used none. But of his longings for her companionship, of his exultation at her presence, of the magnetic influence of her sympathy, he spoke in words of passionate earnestness and thankfulness. And Rhoda felt that here at last was the man for whom her heart had been waiting, that there was nothing which she could not give him.

She went to bed with tears of mortification in her eyes because she had been able to do so little for the cause which he had at heart. But the next morning brought to light a political paradox. The speech which had been absolutely ineffectual in the disused cinematograph theatre at Surreyside was reported at greater or less length in

A SURREYSIDE ELECTION MEETING

almost every daily paper of the country. A brilliant journalist, reduced by drink to casual reporting, had been present, trying to pick up a paragraph or two which he could sell. He had scented his opportunity, taken down the entire speech in shorthand, and after Paul had left, persuaded Paul's agent to motor him up to New Bridge Street. There, having no conscience, he typed several copies of his notes and sold his account of the meeting and report of Rhoda's speech to one Press Agency after another, with the result that editors of daily newspapers all over the country were subject to a heavy bombardment of the doings of the Honourable Rhoda St. Ives. *The Daily Mail* led the way with a poster on which only these words were written :

"RHODA ST. IVES TURNS TORY."

The Times began its chief leading article :

"The most damaging blow which the Liberal Party has received for many a day was dealt it last night by the Honourable Rhoda St. Ives, who for several years past has been the most active hostess on the Liberal side.

"Miss St. Ives appeared last night on the platform at one of the Right Honourable Paul Wentworth's meetings at Surreyside, and announced herself as an out-and-out supporter of Universal Service . . ." etc., etc.

The Telegraph, *The Standard* and *The Morning Post* wrote in the same decorous fashion. *The Express* rivalled *The Mail* in accompanying its account of the meeting and the speech with a column or two of picturesque personalities about the Honourable Rhoda. *The Daily News* ushered in its account with the headline

"PUT NOT YOUR TRUST IN PRINCES."

Rhoda, according to the Cocoa Organ, had done this wicked thing because she was the daughter of a Peer. It did not signify that Lord Lyonesse was the first peer of his house, and that he was a Liberal who had been made a peer by the Liberal Premier for services to the Liberal

PAUL'S WIFE

Party. It seemed that there was something inherently demoralizing in a peerage, even when it was distributed with all these moral safeguards.

The Leader struggled nearer the truth : " Liberals know to their cost," it said, " the extraordinary vehemence of Mr. Paul Wentworth. At the last Colonial Conference it was almost impossible to keep him in his place. He is, without doubt, a man of commanding personality, and Miss St. Ives has succumbed to its glamour. She will find out when it is too late that she is one of those who get lost in the desert by following a mirage."

The Daily Chronicle, as usual the most practical of the Liberal papers, wrote :

" The loss of Miss St. Ives is, undoubtedly, a heavy blow to the Liberal Party. But we must be prepared for a few blows of this sort. The proper definition of a Liberal is ' a patriot open to conviction,' and at the present moment the Tories have the immense advantage of being able to appeal to the best elements in our party on the score not only of patriotism, but of the danger of invasion. We have no quarrel with Miss St. Ives. No one has worked harder or more conscientiously for the Party. We only wish that she had been clearer-sighted in sifting the specious pleas put forward by that old Parliamentary hand, Mr. Wentworth."

One and all emphasized the fact that Rhoda's influence was considerable and that it had been transferred. As soon as Paul had skimmed through what the budget of daily papers which were brought to him at his breakfast-table every morning had to say about the incident, he rang Rhoda up on the telephone.

" Have you seen the papers ? " he asked.

" Two or three of them."

" Then I hope you are satisfied now. What Surrey-side could scarcely listen to has reverberated throughout the country."

" I hope it will reverberate through Surreyside as well—because you know what my first object was."

A SURREYSIDE ELECTION MEETING

"Indeed I do, Rhoda dear."

It was the first time he had called her "dear," and it made her blood tingle. He might not have had the courage, if it had not been for the merciful veil interposed by the telephone.

They did not speak long on the telephone this morning. Now that Rhoda had definitely decided to assist Paul in his campaign, she meant to give her whole days to it, and to be down at the U.S.L. offices, where he began his day, as early as possible every morning. She had arranged on the 'phone to meet him there, and when she arrived there found him awaiting her. John St. Barbe was with him.

"I suppose I needn't keep it a secret any longer, Roe?" he said, with his delightful smile, as they shook hands.

"Oh no! Proclaim it from the housetops! What can I do to help Mr. Wentworth's candidature?"

"Visit the women. I think the strongest argument for giving women the suffrage is that you can only convert the working-class voter to new ideas through his wife. Surreyside is such a huge constituency that you won't be able to visit them all yourself. You must organize a staff among our lady members to assist you. There are plenty of them dying to do something, and they most of them have cars, but I don't suppose that many of them have much idea how to capture the suburban working-man's wife's sympathies, though they understand villagers."

"I wonder if I do?"

"Why of course you do!" he said cheerily, but she did not feel convinced, and he added, "In the meantime may we add your name to the list of our Vice-Presidents, which gives you a seat at our Committee-meetings when you choose to attend?"

"If you think I'm worthy of it."

"Rather! You've been a busy worker on political committees to my knowledge ever since 1905."

"But that has been as a Liberal."

"So much the better. They understand committees much better than we do."

"Well, I will do my best, and I only wish I could do

PAUL'S WIFE

more in this direction, but unfortunately ours is a house divided against itself. Father, under whose direction, as you know, I have been accustomed to work, has never had any communication with Mr. Wentworth since the meeting at the Queen's Hall, though they were so constantly together before, and I have seen very little of father myself. He has been in London, while mother and I have been first in Cornwall and then at Barnes House."

* * * * *

Rhoda found the Surreysiders easier to move over the wash-tub than from the platform. The task of convincing an unsympathetic audience was new to her, but she was an old hand at talking over the women, and as they were mostly Liberals in Surreyside in the districts where she began her work, she understood much better than the Primrose Dames, who poured into the division, the arguments which would appeal to them. She began work at Surreyside the day after her speech. Paul motored her over and started her. She came back home an hour before dinner flushed with the excitement of it, but felt rather as she had felt in Italy, when she had stayed out until sunset on a warm spring afternoon and had no wrap to put on for the drive home, as she caught a glimpse from her bedroom window of her father pacing up and down the terrace.

Lord Lyonesse had certain tricks of attitudinizing with his cigarette when he had anything on his mind ; he was holding it between the bottom joints of his fingers when he took it out of his mouth, and was throwing his head back and half-closing his eyes when he blew out clouds of smoke. That he must have one supremely important thing on his mind went without saying, and Rhoda's stout heart sank within her at the prospect of the discussion. But after a few minutes' hesitation, she dashed downstairs and out upon the terrace to greet him. Had he not been her greatest friend since she was a tiny one ? And if they had to differ on politics, why should she be the first to cloud their sunny love ? Lord Lyonesse heard light footsteps approaching, and turning round, saw Rhoda flying to meet him, flushed and eager, looking as

A SURREYSIDE ELECTION MEETING

well as—nay, better than she had ever looked in her life. He held out his arms, and she buried herself in them.

“What has my little girl been doing?”

“Have you seen the papers, father?”

“Of course I have. But we won’t discuss politics now, Roe. You know the proverb—‘Always let a man get his dinner inside him before . . .’—you know the rest.”

“Oh, father, I’m not afraid of you before dinner!” said Rhoda, not very truthfully, probably from nervousness.

“But we have the sunset to look at,” he said, wiser, perhaps, than she, unwilling to embark on what might be a long subject without plenty of time to thresh it out. And arm-in-arm they walked beside the beautiful pool, which had formed part of the dead lake or morass that gave Mortlake its name. Since he had rented Barnes House, Lord Lyonesse had restored the pool to its old morass appearance as much as possible, by planting tall tufts of bulrushes and reintroducing wild waterfowl and beavers. Now, in early summer, the fenny pool was bordered with the wild yellow iris, in full blossom on the hither side, and on the further side the sunset filled the horizon with a golden light edged with black by the trees of Richmond Park. Father and daughter said little. It was better to let the ties of blood assert themselves through the light touch of her hand upon his arm.

Rhoda dreaded dinner. What if her mother chose to indulge in gibes? They were sure to be clever—Lady Lyonesse had a way of putting her finger upon a sore. And no doubt it would be hugely diverting to her, a shellback Tory, to hear her Liberal husband and daughter falling out like thieves over the bombshell which Paul Wentworth had exploded in the Liberal camp. Fortunately Lady Lyonesse did not wish them to fall out. She wished her husband to fall in, as Rhoda had apparently fallen in, with her own ideas, which were fiercely in favour of Universal Service. So she aired her most recent grievance, the number of trees which had been cut down at Ranelagh since the preceding year. They could easily have raised more money in some simpler way, she said.

PAUL'S WIFE

"But, Caroline"—Lady Lyonesse had been christened Caroline for family reasons, just as Rhoda had been christened Rhoda for purely fancy reasons—"they wouldn't get any money for the timber. They could only use it for firewood." . . . "Tell that to the Tax-Collector!" . . . "Well, do you remember the big elm which used to stand where the stream from the Beverley Brook runs into our lake, and which fell down last year?" . . . "Of course I do!" . . . "Well, Bignall, my lawyer, sent for the man who put up that split-oak paling to keep the boys out, and asked him what he would give for it. 'I can't give anything at all,' but I don't mind removing it, to oblige his Lordship.' 'But,' said Bignall, 'it's a magnificent bit of timber, as sound as ebony; think what coffins you could make out of it!'"—"Coffins!" said Coombes, the timber-yard man; "they send them over from Norway ready-made at a price we cannot touch, one inside the other, from a baby's coffin to a publican's, and the smallest size is filled up with matches!" . . . "Is that really true?" said Lady Lyonesse. "Then all I can say is that if we cannot have protection for our coffins, the country is going to the worms. To have the coffin-industry killed by Free Trade is the limit!"

They were willing enough for Lady Lyonesse to talk on in her acid, amusing fashion, for neither of them quite knew how they meant to begin. So of course she retired rather sooner than usual, to enjoy the evening nap which she took solemnly every night when they were at home and had no company, for the half-hour before the coffee was brought in. Then Rhoda faced her father, and waited for him to begin.

"I read this morning's papers, and here is a fresh budget in which your name figures largely in the headlines," he began, after a little hesitation.

"Yes."

"It was a momentous step to take without consulting—your old ally."

"I know it was."

"Then why did you do it?"

"I had to."

A SURREYSIDE ELECTION MEETING

"Had to?"

"Yes. I felt that Mr. Wentworth was the heaven-born general sent to lead the political forces of our country to victory in the silent battle which is going on among the nations for the survival of the fittest."

"And . . . ?"

"And I felt that I must have done untold mischief with the Little-Englandism I helped to foster at our receptions."

"I suppose you had no qualms of this kind before Mr. Wentworth . . ."

Rhoda gave an involuntary start, and wondered if her father noticed it and assigned to it its proper value. He had plumbed her secret, it seemed, else why should he have put it down to Paul? She nodded shyly, and expected him to press the attack home. He said nothing for a little; then he continued, "It was very disquieting."

She waited for him to declare himself on the subject of her infatuation, but he took up its issue. "Considering the position we have occupied in the Party, that was a very grave step to take, and you might have consulted me."

"There were several reasons against it."

"So important as that?"

"Yes."

He lifted his eyebrows.

"First of all, I have seen very little of you lately, and you have rather kept off the subject of politics when we have met."

"Have I? Yes, I suppose so. I have been particularly sensitive about your mother's gibes recently. She has managed to get me on the raw oftener than usual."

"And second . . . ?" she hesitated.

"Well?"

"And second . . . there, to be honest, I did not ask you for fear that you would refuse, and I felt that I had to do it. You see, it would have been so much worse to do it in the face of your prohibition. . . ."

"But, Rhoda, it would have been against my principles to refuse it. I have always held that every man,

PAUL'S WIFE

and therefore every woman—every adult woman—is a free agent. And you would have been quite at liberty to act as you chose, however I disapproved.”

Rhoda got up from her place at table and walked round to where her father sat, and, leaning against the table, half sitting on it, looked down into his face, letting their eyes meet.

“Father,” she said, “it would have been just as bad knowing that you disapproved as being forbidden.”

“We should have talked it out.”

“With the same result.”

Lord Lyonesse was silent. He knew that he would have done his utmost to dissuade her, and that he might have been driven into some overt action to show his loyalty to the Party. And yet he had been dreadfully disturbed since Paul made his Scribes-and-Pharisees speech. He believed that the Navy was all right, but the Russo-Japanese War had shown that navies are open to surprises, and he felt morally sure that our fortresses and our land forces were too few, and not at all prepared. Nor could he see any chance of getting the Party to take the matter up. They would much sooner risk England's being invaded and conquered than risk the revolt of the Labourites and Little-Englanders.

“What have you done about it, Dad?” *It* was Paul Wentworth's speech. Lord Lyonesse was not a man who generally let the grass grow under his feet politically.

“Done? Nothing—except avoid politics and politicians until I had time to think a bit.”

“Why didn't you go to the non-political meetings of the U.S.L.?”

“You know what the Party are. They regard all who are not for us as against us. They don't know what neutrality means. It's a rooted idea of Liberals that all concessions must be made by the other side.” Rhoda's eyes opened wide. What was her father going to say next? “I have shared the idea myself. At our political receptions I have spoken times out of mind about the wickedness of accepting any compromise in this or the other matter. The path of duty has always

A SURREYSIDE ELECTION MEETING

been perfectly clear to me, and my motto has been : 'Forward, looking neither to the right hand nor the left.' But now the path of duty is not plain to me, and I am waiting for the mist to clear before I know which way to steer. I have lost my compass."

"Mr. Wentworth . . ."

"Yes. Wentworth did it. Of course, I didn't go to Tory meetings, and I did not read their papers much, so I had not grasped how we were drifting until he made that speech, showing that England was at the mercy of an invader, and that the Liberals were unable to spare any time to think about England."

"What have you done about it?"

"Done? The only thing I could do—nothing, except get information from unprejudiced people, that is, from men whom I meet not in politics but in the ordinary occupations of life."

"What occupations?"

"The Club, Racing, Brooklands, the Park—you know the sort of thing."

"Poor dear Papa! You mean the people you meet when you are idling on the rare occasions when you allow yourself a vacation?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"They are not always the cleverest people," said Rhoda from force of habit. At the Lyonesse House receptions the speakers generally spoke with pity about the capacity of the leaders in Finance and Sport, and the Social life of the nation generally.

"Oh, I didn't ask them their opinions," said her father, hastening to excuse himself. "I just listened to what they were saying when a general discussion was going on, so as to get some idea of the state of public—I should say, popular—opinion among, well, among the people who would be bound to suffer most in the case of an invasion."

"And what did they say?"

"The same as Wentworth, and much more, because they had nobody's feelings to consider. They say that the whole thing is rotten."

"Well, of course they would!"

PAUL'S WIFE

"Are you being sarcastic, Rhoda?"

"How can you ask? You saw what I said at Surrey-side. No, what I meant was: 'Of course, they would be dead against the Liberals.' But what new lights did you get on the subject from them?"

"Convincing details. They did not talk about general principles so much as local conditions—the absence of men here, the absence of equipment there—proving always one thing, the broken reeds on which we should have to lean in case of an invasion."

"Seeing as you now see, Father, would you have forbidden me? I mean, would you have advised me not to do what I did?"

"Yes, I think I should have thought it too great a step to take."

"Then I am glad that I did not ask you."

"I am not sure that I am not glad."

"Father . . ." began Rhoda, and suddenly stopped.

"What is it, dear?"

"You can't stop where you are."

His eyes involuntarily wandered round the room, to see if the walls were on fire or assassins were preparing to spring on him. He was quite aware that she was referring not to the state of the room, but to the state of politics; it was only a trick that his eyes played on him. "I wish I could act with the same woman's impulsiveness as you have acted," he said. "Women are apt to be right. But men must live up to their standards, and for a man to cross the floor of the House is as great an ordeal as the Day of Judgment."

"When we are all going to receive a lecture from the Judge and be admitted to heaven."

"There are so many judges to receive a lecture from in politics."

"I suppose you wouldn't come to one of our meetings?—not on the platform, but in some place where you wouldn't be noticed in the hall?" said Rhoda, wishing to strike while the iron was hot.

"I should be sure to be recognized. It would be almost as bad as if I came on the platform." Lord Lyonesse had his vanities, and he could not believe that

A SURREYSIDE ELECTION MEETING

his presence at any public meeting could pass unnoticed. It was so long since he had attended one at which he was not on the platform, and conspicuously announced. Whatever she may have thought Rhoda was tactful enough to agree with him.

"But how would it be if Mr. Wentworth came here on Sunday night? We haven't asked him since the day at the Queen's Hall, because we thought you might not like it."

"Do you think there would be any chance of his coming on Sunday?" he asked—perhaps to evade direct comment on her last remark.

"I am sure he would; he doesn't have any meetings on Sunday."

"But he might have some other engagement."

"Of course he might," said Rhoda, who had her own reasons for thinking otherwise. "Shall mother write and ask him?"

"Certainly, certainly! I had no wish that he should stay away from the house. You know we have always been very glad to meet our political opponents socially."

When coffee was brought, as a signal that Lady Lyonesse had finished her nap, Rhoda gave her father's message about Paul Wentworth. Rhoda did not wish to write that letter herself, for though she had slipped into calling Paul Wentworth, *Paul*, she had not yet taken the step of writing it in a letter.

"Why can't you write it yourself?" asked Lady Lyonesse, who hated trouble.

"Mother, I think it would come better from you."

"Now, why?"

It was on the tip of Rhoda's tongue to say, "He might think I was doing it on my own," but she remembered in time, and gave the excuse formal. "We haven't invited him for several weeks, you know—not since the Queen's Hall."

"The Queen's Hall" had become an epoch-marker in the Lyonesse household, like the taking of the Bastille in the history of the French Revolution. With a sudden fit of energy, Lady Lyonesse crossed the room to the *eseritoire* and wrote the note. She had a different

PAUL'S WIFE

reason for thinking that it would come better from her, and she thought it would be an interesting experiment to parade Rhoda and Paul together before her husband.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DINNER AT BARNES HOUSE

WHEN Paul arrived for dinner at Barnes House on that Sunday evening, Lord and Lady Lyonesse were on the terrace; they always rendezvoused on the terrace for dinner in summer when the weather was sufficiently warm and fine. Paul was charmed with the house; he had not seen it before by day. It was an unambitious Georgian house of the Petersham type; but it had rich colour and quaint detail to recommend it, and the terrace overlooking the reedy lake was delightful. Paul was gratified to find Lord Lyonesse as cordial as ever. He was not to know that his host took a chivalrous pleasure in entertaining him as an enemy who had recently distinguished himself.

Rhoda met him in the hall to take him out on the terrace. She had been watching at one of the upstairs windows for his arrival—love makes watchers of us all—and timed herself to be coming downstairs as the door was opened to him. She had chosen her dress and her ornaments with particular care, and as she stepped down the great old-fashioned staircase her beauty and her breeding and her alluringness were accentuated, as she hoped they would be, for the man she loved.

"I'll take Mr. Wentworth out on the terrace," she said to the servant, and when he had gone she whispered, "Call me Rhoda quickly! I mayn't have the chance of hearing you say my name again to-night, Paul."

"How beautiful you are to-night, Rhoda!" From the ordinary man this would have sounded too patent. But from Paul it came as a conviction, not as a compliment.

"Father, here is Mr. Wentworth!" cried Rhoda. Her mother noticed the smile of proprietorship on the girl's face. But she was on the look-out for it. Lord Lyonesse received Paul with marked cordiality, to show him that

THE DINNER AT BARNES HOUSE

he bore no ill-will for the Queen's Hall incident. Lady Lyonesse's little plain greeting meant almost as much, for it was the way in which she received her real friends. Paul knew that by this time.

Lord Lyonesse noted the smile of proprietorship, too. In ordinary times it would have meant that Rhoda had recaptured Paul Wentworth for the Liberal fold. Now he attached an opposite meaning to it. But since "J. Lyonesse and Co., Unlimited" were no longer caterers to the Liberal Party, he was less troubled than he might have been. That the personal element might count for more than the political did not enter his mind.

During dinner there was nothing to show that any of the party had the smallest connection with public life. The conversation was mostly about the aeroplaning at Ranelagh, which was the latest novelty, and about Lord Lyonesse's attempts to make beavers feel at home in his artificially-wild lake. The Beverley Brook which fed it was noted for its beavers in the Middle Ages.

But when the two men went into the drawing-room after dinner, Rhoda, whom they found alone, felt that she must do something to vitalize the atmosphere. If two such workers as her father and Paul were only to meet like two horses in the street, why were they to meet at all? "Father," she said, "I suppose that the cigar you have just been smoking may be regarded as the pipe of peace?"

"What exactly do you mean by that, Roe?"

"To plunge into another metaphor, have you buried the hatchet?"

"We have behaved as if there wasn't any hatchet, I think, and I suppose we should have founded on that a masterly policy of drift, if only you had let sleeping dogs lie."

"But I don't want you to be a sleeping dog. I want you to be in the battle, like a St. Ives. I don't think that you can be against Mr. Wentworth on so great an issue." It was a gambler's plunge, forcing her father to declare himself. It affected Lord Lyonesse profoundly. He had not only to think if he was for or against Paul Wentworth in a matter to which a patriot could not be

PAUL'S WIFE

deaf ; he had also to think if he was for or against his ancient ally and fellow-worker in politics—his beautiful daughter.

“A man’s house should not be divided against itself,” he said at last. “Thy people shall be my people—I endorse what my daughter has done, Wentworth. You can command me in any way in which you have commanded her.” Who could have told how much significance was to attach to these words ?

Paul said nothing, but held out his hand and gave Lord Lyonesse the Australian Grip. Rhoda kissed her father.

CHAPTER XVIII

LADY LYONESSE PUTS HER FOOT DOWN

THE Surreyside election was over. In spite of Paul’s superhuman efforts, in spite of his eloquence and his power of browbeating a hostile audience, he failed to eject the Liberal who had been returned so many times for the Borough. Surreyside did not care about the Empire ; Surreyside liked the confiscatory proposals of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That Paul had reduced the sitting member’s majority from 2,464 to 4 did not affect him ; it did not give him a seat, and though the Unionists had as many seats as the Liberals, not counting the Irish and Labour, it had only been achieved by throwing over Universal Service, and promising a referendum before passing a measure for Tariff Reform into law if the Unionists came into power.

All through this long and bitter fight at Surreyside, Paul had been buoyed up by the constant presence of Rhoda, tireless in her efforts to return him. Knowing the Liberal mind so well, she had induced many hitherto staunch Liberals to vote for him, in addition to the number of wobblers captured by her charm and persistence. The campaign had been one long love-scene for Paul, though there had not been one word of love-making. For all day long there had been the chance of Rhoda bursting into his presence, full of enthusiasm, sometimes glowing with pride, at other times showing

LADY LYONESSE PUTS HER FOOT DOWN

her affection by her disappointment ; but always, though she did not confess it to herself, a lover coming into the presence of her beloved. As one of his chief workers she had access to him at all times of the day, and was very often at his home as well as at his Committee rooms.

Vivien was not jealous. She seemed absolutely indifferent as to how much Rhoda was with her husband, and was rather more than civil to her when they were thrown together. In the election she utterly refused to take any part. That was Paul's affair, not hers. She did not see why she should bother about it—to which she added, when she saw that people were unable to understand this attitude in a wife, that she was an Australian, and British politics were nothing to her. She actually kept out of the way, and Paul had come to rely on her so little that he hardly noticed it. He did not think of inquiring what she was doing, for she never did anything which was worth doing. She got through her day somehow by thinking of all the things that might amuse her and dismissing them from her mind as dull, until she gradually drifted into doing one or more of them, generally with censorious remarks going most of the time. And Freddy, whose duty it was now to spend most of the day at Albert Hall Mansions attending to Paul's general business and telephoning-on any messages which concerned the election, aided and abetted her.

He did his own job pretty well. It suited him to sit on a burgher chair with a box of cigarettes and a whisky and soda on the table beside him, answering telephones without the trouble of moving from his seat, and spending the intervals in talking to the beautiful woman who lounged on the sofa, flirting with her ankles ; and smoking innumerable cigarettes. The cigarette was seldom out of the beautiful crimson mouth, except when she had something demolishing to remark or an inquiry to make about the day's amusements. To her mind, Freddy was there to find amusements for her—to which he generally accompanied her after working hours. He had the grace to stay lolling about Paul's study until his hours were up. Vicky, of course, was nearly always out with her brother.

PAUL'S WIFE

The Lyonesses had raised no objections to Rhoda's being so much with Paul. They knew a good deal about elections, and about Rhoda's total immersion when she was engaged in an election. Lady Lyonesse, too, was most anxious for Paul's return. And Lord Lyonesse, who had a vote for some property in Surreyside, voted for him himself, though he would not use his influence against the Party with which he had been so long associated. But now the election was over, and there was no excuse for Rhoda being with Paul all day long, as she had been through the previous weeks. Lady Lyonesse told her so. For the mother's heart was now aroused. It was too plain to her that Rhoda was in love with Paul, and no good could come of letting it overpower her. Paul was a married man, with a wife of whom he saw pretty little. Lady Lyonesse had made that out—a wife, moreover, who seemed to care nothing about what he did. She gave Paul credit for steadiness, for being able to live in the pleasant atmosphere of a beautiful girl's affection without wishing to commit any excesses. But of Rhoda she did not feel so sure. Rhoda had kept so free from love-affairs that there was no basis for an estimate. And Rhoda's ardour over Paul's political affairs had been of a different nature from her ardour over the *Ostrich* propaganda in the old days. In a word, she was convinced that matters were rather serious.

Whatever else she lacked—manners, feeling, intelligence—she certainly did not lack courage. So she spoke to Rhoda as she had never spoken to her before. She told her that she could be as civil as she liked to Paul when she met him at other people's houses, that the Wentworths could be asked to Lyonesse House or Barnes House pretty frequently, and that she herself would go to their flat with Rhoda as often as civility demanded. But Rhoda was not to go about with Paul alone, or to pay him attentions which would be marked when they met, and she ended up by saying, "I can't forbid you to write to him at your age, but I hope you won't. I'm sure that he is far too busy to write to you, except to answer your letters."

Rhoda was petrified by the suddenness of her mother's veto. All she could stammer out was, "The Unionists

LADY LYONESSE PUTS HER FOOT DOWN

are sure to give him another seat to contest—you are not going to make me stultify myself politically by deserting him ? ”

“ You must persuade your father to join you in helping him.” Even at so serious a moment Lady Lyonesse’s grim sense of humour got the better of her. She could not help chuckling to herself over the killing of two birds with one stone—checkmating Rhoda and driving her husband across the Rubicon. She had no doubts as to Rhoda’s making him go.

Having broken the ice, Lady Lyonesse had a good deal to say to Rhoda on the subject of Paul—and most of what she said was horribly true. She excelled at putting her finger on a sore, and she thought that if she only brought enough guns to bear upon Rhoda, she would crush her with sheer weight of metal—especially as Rhoda cried a great deal, it being the first time that her mother had ever been unkind to her. Lady Lyonesse’s callousness and want of tact had often carried her through as well as her husband’s tact and generosity. But her attack in this instance received a serious check from the simplicity which was such a charming feature in Lord Lyonesse, and which Rhoda inherited.

No words of love had ever passed between Rhoda and Paul. She had worked for him like a steam-hammer and had worshipped him as a political Paladin. He had felt the deepest gratitude to her and had delighted in her beautiful presence and gracious companionship. Yet throughout they had been fellow-workers and good comrades—sentiment had only lain in the admiration of her beauty and his power. But when Lady Lyonesse roundly accused Rhoda of being in love with Paul, she recognized that she was in love with Paul, passionately in love with Paul, if such a term may be used where sexual feeling was absent. And she wrote to Paul that her mother had discovered her love for him and detailed the restrictions that were to be put on her and said that they would not affect her love for him, that she would always continue to love him, etc. And as a postscript she added : “ Do contest another seat ! ”

Condemned to outlawry from the beloved presence,

PAUL'S WIFE

which had been his for all the hours of the working day for many weeks past, and told in imperishable ink that the beautiful and famous Rhoda St. Ives was his by love, Paul knew that he was no longer master of himself, that the gods in giving him this crown of life had made him their plaything. He could no longer pursue his solitary way, a bloodless builder of history. He was Paris and there was Helen. And the tale of Troy—the world well lost for a woman, might tell itself again, with no Homer to make it lovely to the world. That was in the first fine careless rapture at Rhoda's confession that she loved him. Then he thought of the black shadows that Lady Lyonesse's decision cast across his life. The presence of Rhoda had grown to be his sunshine. If it was lacking, the day was dark.

Vivien was growing impossible. She resented the smallest attempt at intelligent conversation at the table. Nothing but the banalities of Freddy interested her. It was a mercy that Freddy was there, to save Paul from having to make conversation. Even Vicky had lost her spirits. There was nothing but the ragging of Vivien and Freddy, who had transferred himself completely from Lyonesse House to Albert Hall Mansions. Ragging—how he hated the word! though it did keep Vivien in a good humour—and glum silence.

He had not even affairs of real interest to occupy his mind now that the all-engrossing election was over, for the Universal Service League was holding its hand until the new Parliament met. The season also was one that depressed him. The election had been in the autumn, after the harvest was over. Winter was approaching, with long months of dark and cold weather, peculiarly trying to an Australian. He could not play golf, neither could he skate. He could have hunted if he lived in the country; but life in the country appalled him. The people, except the biggest people, had such a narrow outlook. There was nothing for it but to get through the day somehow, and dine and, unless he was going to the theatre, go to bed. This for Paul Wentworth, who had never known a heavy hour until he left his native land! By his own action he was almost entirely cut off from Rhoda's

LADY LYONESSE PUTS HER FOOT DOWN

society. For he did not see how he could with any dignity accept invitations to the Lyonesses' house or correspond with Rhoda, in the face of her mother's wishes, and Lady Lyonesse had herself ordered Putney 1250 to be removed from Rhoda's bedroom, so that she could not carry on lengthy conversations without being noticed. Therefore he would have few words with her, except when he met her by chance at the houses of mutual friends. And that had not happened, because Paul was not a man who made a habit of calls.

Rhoda stood it for a few weeks, and then could stand it no longer. She was too sensible to eat her heart out in silence when it was easy to catch a frequent glimpse of Paul and to converse with him for as long as she pleased on the telephone. A letter posted by herself, telling Paul to keep people out of his study, as he so often did, next morning, was all that was required. There was a telephone in the Mayfair Women's Liberal Association Committee rooms in a cul-de-sac off Bond Street, which had not been used since Rhoda and her father, who paid for them, had stopped doing Party work. Rhoda, armed with the latch-key, took a morning constitutional to Bond Street, with her dog, and the thing was done. Her going into her own Committee rooms naturally excited no comment; no one went with her or followed her in. She walked up to the door, studying what she imagined had been the way in which she had always walked up to it. Once inside, she would fly to the secretary's telephone. She checked herself as suddenly, because she feared that there might be somebody else in the house, though it was hardly possible. And again when she was in the secretary's room, she crossed from the door to the instrument in one bound.

When she seized the instrument and unhooked the receiver she felt inclined to call down it: "Paul! Paul!" She restrained herself and said, in the usual telephone voice: "Double-one-nought-double-nought-Kensington." The reply came back almost immediately: "Hallo!" . . . "Is Mr. Wentworth there?" . . . "I am Mr. Wentworth." . . . This did not prevent Rhoda from rejoicing, "Oh, Paul, is that you?" . . . "Of course

PAUL'S WIFE

it is, dear!" . . . He could call her dear and anything he liked down the telephone, without anyone knowing. "Oh, Paul, I love you!" said the President of the Mayfair Women's Liberal Association. . . . "Not more than I love you, dear!" replied the ex-Prime Minister of Australia to the Second Woman.

Soon they began to talk sense, but sense tempered by the burning enthusiasm of the human being for the person it loves best in the world. If Rhoda took her little dog out for a walk every morning after breakfast and called in at a certain house off Bond Street and put her pretty mouth to a funnel and her pretty ear to a receiver, all would be well in the state of Denmark. And a certain statesman would be seated in his room, engaged in business of the utmost importance.

That very afternoon Paul astonished Mrs. St. Barbe in her manor house at Richmond by attending one of her Wednesday receptions. He was naturally the hero of the hour in a great Conservative house, after reducing one of the most popular Liberal candidate's majority from 2,464 to 4. John St. Barbe came forward to meet him. "Well, Wentworth?" . . . "Well, Saint?"

They had become very intimate since Paul's adoption as the Independent candidate for Surreyside, and to his intimates John St. Barbe was always *Saint*. The two men had a long talk, the host congratulating the guest on his splendid fight for Surreyside, and discussing the practical certainty of some Unionist offering to vacate a safe seat for him. The presence of the great Colonial statesman in the House was so imperative.

Paul was just in the act of saying that he should not accept it unless the Conservative leaders made Universal Service one of their planks, when Rhoda came in, and after shaking hands with her hostess, came across the room to where they were standing. Always conspicuous for her beauty and the distinction with which she dressed, she was more noticeable than usual to-day, on account of her animation and verve, as she joined the two men. For she had not seen Paul since she wrote that ominous letter, and his presence quickened her blood. Her animation could be plausibly accounted for.

LADY LYONESSE PUTS HER FOOT DOWN

"This is the worker who so nearly won me my seat, Saint."

"Mag-ni-fi-cent!" said John St. Barbe, with emphasis. "Having won over Rhoda St. Ives is better than winning over a Cabinet Minister." He stayed with Paul and Rhoda for half an hour. He was anxious to show her the value which the Conservatives attached to her help. When at last he was called away to be introduced to some strangers, it was perfectly natural for Paul and Rhoda to remain together, waiting for his return, which did not happen. They sat down on a convenient sofa and passed off as two political co-workers "talking shop." Not one person suspected their being lovers. Their conversation, which fortunately no one overheard, was decidedly non-political. They confessed how cruelly they had missed each other; they registered to each other the pulses of delight which they were feeling; they avoided discussing anything important, for fear of making the time go too quickly, and yet they had the shadow of a supremely important matter falling upon them—Mr. St. Barbe's conviction that someone would be found by the Party leaders to vacate a safe Unionist seat for Paul, which would mean his soon being involved in another election contest—pre-eminently the subject which political co-workers ought to have been discussing.

As the afternoon wore on, the Party awoke to the fact of the hero and heroine of the Surrey-side election being present, and politicians and their wives kept coming up to congratulate them, or to press them to come to their own receptions. Rhoda, when she went home, was full of the political side of the party, and of the politicians' reception-cards which were going to arrive. She was shy enough (or frank enough—which was it?) to urge her mother to accompany her to them. She knew that without her mother she could not go on rendezvousing with Paul at them an unlimited number of times, and she could say anything private over the telephone. Her mother's presence would not prevent her feeding her eyes on Paul and her ears on the sound of his voice. In fact, the easiest way to achieve it would be to stay

PAUL'S WIFE

by her mother's side while her mother was talking to Paul. Lady Lyonesse was fond of talking to Paul. He interested her a good deal before he suddenly became an object of such unfortunate concern to her.

So Lady Lyonesse accepted these Conservative invitations to :

“ Lord and Lady Lyonesse.

The Hon. Rhoda St. Ives.”

She had no objections to his eyeing Rhoda while he talked to herself. She did not wish to be unkind or to forfeit his good feeling, and Rhoda, hitherto a centre of life in any roomful of people, sat demurely by her mother's side, putting in an occasional word, but letting her mother do the conversation. It was valuable for the pair of them to be seen under her mother's ægis.

Occasionally Vivien went with Paul instead of or as well as Vicky—not at his instance ; such a piece of hypocrisy would have been entirely foreign to his nature—but following her instinct of being attracted to the people to whom he was attracted. When she went, she made Rhoda talk. For talking was Vivien's chief amusement in life, as it often is with people born in climates where all exertion in the summer is a burden to the flesh. Vivien's sardonic and *nil-admirari* remarks made highly-entertaining conversation, and Lady Lyonesse encouraged her. For Vivien's importation into the group was the easiest way of allaying gossip. Had Vivien's conversation been of a kindlier and more personal nature, Rhoda could hardly have stood the hypocrisy of the situation, but as it was entirely sarcastic about everybody and every topic except the one on which sarcasm would have been natural as well as legitimate, she let Vivien show her friendliness in her own remarkable way.

“ I'm afraid that you're rather bad society for a hero-worshipping gairl, Mr. Wentworth,” said Lady Lyonesse at the first reception at which they met, when Rhoda's attention was engaged. The gentle smile he gave rather disarmed her, though it confessed his love. “ You must be careful,” she continued kindly, “ because gairls get talked about.” He was visibly uncomfortable. “ May I be frank with you ? ”

LADY LYONESSE PUTS HER FOOT DOWN

"Yes," he said, making up his mind to it, as he would to endure an operation.

"My daughter has caught a fever of hero-worship for you; there is nothing she would not do for you. She would bring you her own head on a charger if it were possible." A blush showed through even his dark, freckled skin. "And it would be less than human in you not to be sensible of such devotion. She has shown it in solid political work as well as in feeling. And as a mother, I must add, not to be sensible of such beauty." He blushed again. "But there is no reason why it should lead to *têtes-à-têtes* or stolen meetings." He bowed. "My daughter is just as happy to sit and listen while you talk to me." A voice within him said: "Thou hypocrite!" but he did not interrupt her. "And it's a shame that *noblesse oblige* should make you waste your time on talking to a gairl."

He wondered if she knew that the shoe was pinching the other foot, that *noblesse oblige* demanded that he should not talk to the girl? If so, she was uncommonly tactful, and she had a reputation to the contrary. As a fact, her intuition had carried Lady Lyonesse far. But she did not wish to terminate the affection between Rhoda and Paul; she only wished to keep it within bounds. For Paul she had a strong liking. She was convinced that he was the greatest man in British politics, that in his hands the Empire would be consolidated into a great commercial union and the Conservative Party made a real and living thing again, and she wished Rhoda to continue to be his helper and *confidante* in politics, to be the woman-star of his public life—but she wished it to be of his *public* life, though she was willing for the friendship to be deep and for it to become historical. And she was willing to come out of her shell of indolence to help to solidify the friendship and eliminate the undesirable elements. She could see no reason why friendship should not take the place of Love. No one who saw the more than friendly way in which Lady Lyonesse said good-bye to Paul could have credited the rift which occurred between the families on the following day.

PAUL'S WIFE

CHAPTER XIX

MATTHEW PURDY, SPY

It all came of Matthew Purdy, who saw Rhoda go into the rooms of the *Mayfair Women's Liberal Association* as he was walking to his office the next morning. He, too, as solicitor of the Association, had a key; he was a pettifogging solicitor who had a couple of rooms in the house opposite the Committee rooms, and made a living out of suing for Bond Street tradesmen's bills. His idea was that Rhoda, being no longer a Liberal, had sinister designs on the Club papers—whether to destroy them or to hand them over to the Conservatives to be used against the Liberal Cause, he could not be sure. But, in any case, she could be there for no good.

Creeping stealthily behind her, he watched her go into the secretary's room. "Right, by Jove!" he said, but instead of touching the papers, she went straight up to the telephone. Then an inspiration came to him. The telephone in Rhoda's own room on the floor above was an annexe to the telephone in the secretary's room. Telephones came first to the secretary; if they were for Rhoda he touched a switch, and the message went through to her. But the instrument, as Mr. Purdy knew, had for a long time been out of order, and if you took down the receiver in Rhoda's room you could hear the conversation that was going on at the secretary's telephone. So he flew upstairs as fast as he could, without making a noise, and took down the receiver.

He had an unexpected reward. He heard Rhoda's endearing phrases to Paul and Paul's endearing phrases to Rhoda; inquiries as to whether her mother suspected anything; plans of campaign for the next twenty-four hours. Purdy could take down in shorthand from the telephone, a most difficult accomplishment, which came in useful in the shady kind of business which was his mainstay. He took down every word the lovers said, and the moment Rhoda rang off, slipped out of the

MATTHEW PURDY, SPY

room into a disused bedroom, in case she should come up for anything. She did not. He soon heard the front door close behind her, and after a judicious interval, slipped across to his own office, to think what use he should make of his good fortune. At first he thought of sending his notes to a well-known Little-Englander newspaper. But he knew that it could only afford a few pounds, and might be unwilling to offend so good a Liberal as Lord Lyonesse, or, what was worse, become involved in a lawsuit against his long purse.

Then it struck him that the notes ought to be worth much more to Lord Lyonesse than to anybody else. So he typed them out in duplicate, and sat down to write a letter to the noble lord. "Dear Lord Lyonesse," it began, for Purdy regarded himself as a friend of the family, having very often been to entertainments in the political part of Lyonesse House, which was shut off from the rest as rigidly as the surgery in a doctor's house.

"DEAR LORD LYONESSE,

"A low blackguard of a telephone operator has just come to me as a member of the Association, to ask me to arrange for your purchase of an incriminating telephone correspondence which lasted for about an hour between your daughter and the Right Honourable Paul Wentworth. Thinking that it would be likely to interest you, he took it down in shorthand. I forward a type-written copy of the correspondence for your inspection, and if you are willing to pay one hundred pounds for it, you are to have it. I have stipulated that the original shorthand notes must be given up. I hope I have acted with the consideration for your interests which you have a right to expect, and I should strongly advise you to pay the money and stop the fellow's power to do mischief. From what I know of him, he is sure to try and dispose of them to . . ."—he wrote some Little-Englander paper, but scratched it out and substituted—"John Bull.

'I am your lordship's obedient servant,

"and, may I add, old friend,

"MATTHEW PURDY."

PAUL'S WIFE

This precious missive, with the typewritten copy of the correspondence enclosed, he sent round by his one clerk to Lyonesse House. For a moment Lord Lyonesse thought of telephoning for a member of his solicitors' firm, Dean, Green and Gore, to come round to him. Then he thought that as it was an unpleasant case, and Purdy had shown a friendly interest in the matter, he might just as well employ him, so he told the clerk to ask Mr. Purdy to step round.

Purdy said, "Oh, pay the man the money and have done with it! You don't want Miss St. Ives' name in the papers."

"But will it keep it out if I do pay it? How do I know that he won't make another copy?"

"I have his notes here."

"But perhaps he might have made another copy."

"He hadn't time. He told me when it happened, and I can judge how long it took him to copy out his notes. He couldn't possibly have made a second copy in the time." Mr. Purdy trusted to Lord Lyonesse not thinking about the possibility of a duplicate. If he did, the thing would have to be bluffed out somehow. But he did not.

"Well, I think I had better write the cheque."

"He won't take a cheque, my lord; he won't even take notes. He stipulated for gold."

"Curse the man! I don't carry a bag of gold about me!"

"You can make the cheque out to me, my lord, and I can change it. That will be safer, because I shall be a witness that it has been paid."

"You are a good fellow, Purdy!" said the easy-going peer.

"Oh, no, my lord."

"Yes, you are, a jolly good fellow."

Purdy bore the praise without wincing, took the cheque and handed over the shorthand notes.

"But how am I to know that these are the right notes?"

"Let me look at them, my lord. It's always difficult to make out another person's shorthand notes, but the

RHODA'S CAPTIVITY

word 'Rhoda' comes very frequently in the typescript, and I can make out if there is a sign to correspond to that in the notes." He scrutinized them carefully. "Yes, do you see this mark, my lord, coming here, and here, and here? That stands for 'Rhoda.'"

"Well, Purdy, give them to me. You mustn't mind my saying good-morning to you rather abruptly. I must go into this matter at once."

Purdy shook hands and bowed himself out. He was a hundred pounds the richer, and he felt that he had knocked out Paul Wentworth, whom he hated.

CHAPTER XX

RHODA'S CAPTIVITY: LORD VANSTRY'S OFFER

LORD LYONESSE took the correspondence straight to his wife. He stood watching her frown as she read it; he could not fathom her thoughts. Her expression was habitually baffling. She read it through carefully and laid it down. "What is to be done?" she asked.

"Damn the little pimp who caught them!"

"But that won't be sufficient."

"I was not answering your question; I was relieving my feelings."

"Yes, damn him," said Lady Lyonesse; "but what are we going to do?"

"I suppose we must do something, although it would be far better to do nothing, except let Rhoda know that she has been caught."

"Mr. Wentworth must be forbidden the house."

"I thought you said that he won't come to it, as it is?"

"He must be forbidden, all the same, and Rhoda must be forbidden to go to his house."

"Does she go?"

"No, but it's necessary to forbid her. And of course this telephone business must be stopped."

"I suppose so."

"What do you mean, John?"

"I mean what I say—that I suppose it must be

stopped. But yet I feel that it may not be wise to stop it."

"Why?"

"There's nothing in all these notes—taken down by a hostile, or, at any rate, a carrion-hunting, witness, which an innocent lady and an innocent gentleman could not say to each other."

"Why, it's *Paul* and *Rhoda* and *dear* all through!"

"I know. I was sure, without seeing these eaves-droppings, that they used their Christian names and *deared* each other. They oughtn't to do it, that's admitted; and they ought not to plan rendezvous at friends' houses—though what harm they could get into at crowded Conservative meetings in good houses, where everyone knows them by sight, I cannot see; and of course it's very naughty of Rhoda to go and telephone from the *Mayfair Women's Liberal Association's* Committee-rooms. The Association was in low enough water without that. But the fact remains that the word 'love' is not once mentioned, and the conversation is principally taken up with the pleasure of meeting, and the necessity of fixing what Paul is going to do about contesting another seat in Parliament."

"'Paul,' dear?"

"Yes, he is Paul; I can't think of him as anything else. He's a good man. I feel sure that everything would come right if we could only afford not to take it seriously."

"Heavens alive, John! Do you know that you are talking about Rhoda? About Rhoda's honour?"

"Yes, I know, but one is apt to do more harm than good if one leaps before one looks."

"John, this is too serious a matter to be disposed of by turning proverbs upside down, and it isn't witty, either."

"Well, Caroline, dispose of it yourself. I don't see what we can do, except take her down to Cornwall and have the gates guarded by keepers and dogs, or lock her up in her room with a lunatic she-nurse to prevent her jumping out of the window."

"Taking her down to Cornwall would stop her seeing him or talking to him on the 'phone."

RHODA'S CAPTIVITY

"Probably the two worst things you could do for her."

"My dear man, they've got to be done!"

"Possibly they have, but I don't like them. Rhoda's in a state in which she is bound to find an outlet. She hasn't got into much harm so far, but the question is what outlet she'll find when this one is stopped."

"Things will probably settle themselves quite simply. She must be forbidden to accept any invitations at all for the present."

"She might go without."

"I mean that she must be forbidden to go to anyone's house for the present. That will put a stop to her meeting him."

"She can meet him in the street, or at Princes'."

"Then forbid her to go out at all, except with one of us."

"What about telephoning?"

"Forbid that too."

"And writing?"

"Of course."

"Well, I think you're overdoing it. You can't make a girl like Rhoda lead this blind-man's-buff existence."

"What do you propose, then?"

"Let her see him as much as she likes, within reasonable limits, and put her on her honour not to do anything foolish."

* * * * *

Lady Lyonesse's methods had to be adopted, because Rhoda refused to give her word in any way. It involved taking the telephones out of Lyonesse House, and interfered a great deal with Lady Lyonesse's habits, and Rhoda, who did not sulk, looked sad, and was far from well. She talked to her parents in the ordinary way, except on one topic. She wrote to Paul, to tell him how things were. It is practically impossible to prevent a person who is not locked up from posting a letter in London. Rhoda used to take the opportunity when her mother was not looking to ask policemen to post her letters. When they read the address: "The Right Honourable Paul Wentworth," etc., they con-

cluded that it was *bona fide*, and put the letters into the pillar-boxes. In her first letter she wrote :

“ MY DEAREST PAUL,

“ For the present I am practically a prisoner, forbidden to see you, or write to you or 'phone to you. I am not allowed to go out alone, or to pay any calls. They think that in this way they will make me forget you. But they never will. It is too childish to think so. Things are sure to right themselves, so don't worry. I shall never love anyone else.

“ RHODA.

“ P.S.—It is no good posting letters to me ; they will be opened. If you want to get a letter to me, tell Freddy to manage it. He'll know which of our servants he can trust.

“ P.S. No. 2.—If you don't write, I shall be broken-hearted.”

Freddy Fenwick was one of those people who, in spite of their general worthlessness, never cease to be heroes to their valets. He knew that one of the underfootmen, who generally valeted him when he was staying at Lyonesse House, would do anything for him. He likewise knew that the public house in Stafford Street, Piccadilly, which had a very pretty barmaid, was this young man's favourite haunt. Both Freddy and the footman were among Hebe's favoured admirers, and Freddy, meeting him there and standing him a gin and ginger beer, arranged to send Paul's letters to Rhoda, enclosed in tipster's envelopes, addressed to the footman, who “ did a bit on the turf,” at a small tobaccoist's shop near Lyonesse House, where he received his other tipster's letters, chiefly from Holland. The footman, when he had husked Paul's envelopes from their sporting covering, easily got them to Rhoda unobserved through her maid, Marianne, who hated Lady Lyonesse for her withering sarcasms. Eventually, Paul put his dignity in his pocket and wrote, and thereafter the lovers' correspondence was practically unchecked.

RHODA'S CAPTIVITY

Paul was more fortunate than Rhoda, though he felt the separation more keenly than she did, because he, after passing nearly half a century of his life without being vouchsafed to know the exquisiteness of the companionship of a charming and perfectly suitable woman, had realized it only to lose it immediately afterwards. He was more fortunate, because he had affairs to occupy him, though they did not prove the soundness of the old Latin proverb : *Res age, fugit Amor*. He wrote his daily mail to Rhoda when he came home at night, no matter how late he was. A Prime Minister is accustomed to work late. In it he told all the happenings of his day : his strivings, his successes, his failures, his disappointments, the offers which had been made to him, and the blank left in the midst of it all by the denial of her sweet presence. And when he had written it, and sealed it in its own envelope, and further enclosed it in one of the ridiculous and undignified tipster's envelopes procured for him by Freddy, he went out and posted it in the pillar-box outside the Albert Hall, which seems as little in need of such a convenience as the temple of Baalbek.

Now that he had no precious hour of telephoning with her in the morning, he went earlier and earlier to the Universal Service League offices. The movement seemed to be making some headway in the country, but it had suffered a grievous setback by the refusal of the Conservative Chiefs to make it a plank in the Party policy. Discouraged by the fact that the balance of parties remained just where it had been before the election—Conservatives and Liberals a dead heat, not reckoning the hundred and twenty odd Irish and Labour votes, which the Liberals could always reckon on at a price—they thought it too heavy a burden for them to carry through. This was not a little due to the attitude of Lord Vanstry, who saw in it a formidable barrier to his great scheme for abolishing Party Government, and replacing it by a sort of patriotic party, consisting of a system of groups following various leaders, who could find some policy upon which a sufficient majority of them could combine—a system which at least one of the great

Continental Powers had found to work successfully. Certainly, when in two Parliaments the Liberals and Conservatives had had an exactly equal number of seats, and the balance of power was left to the Irish and Labour Parties, who could therefore demand almost what they pleased as the price of voting for the Liberals, it seemed time that something should be done. Lord Vanstry was immoderately vain on every point except one—he had no illusions about his indolence. He could think out a great scheme; he could preach it with brilliant eloquence to the public, and make its details perfectly lucid to his colleagues. But he quailed at the idea of conducting a campaign, though he had the greatest industry in collecting a staff of brilliant and tenacious men to carry out his crusade and make use of the victories it won. He now meant to start a crusade against Party, break up the regular parties into little groups following their natural leaders, and make himself Prime Minister by combining a sufficient number of them in the pursuit of some National object. His idea of a National object was a policy upon which all his supporters could be made to agree. Upon one point he could not be gainsaid. Party Government had come to a deadlock with no solution, short of a coalition or a revolution, except the one he offered. He was a Conservative of sorts, the sort who can only be distinguished from a Wait-and-See Liberal by the clubs he belongs to and the side of the House on which he sits.

There were plenty of Conservatives who were not much more in earnest than the Liberals about advancing the Army. The difference between them was that, whereas a large section of the Liberal Party demanded the reduction of the Army, or, at any rate, its *reductio ad absurdum*, there was no section of the Conservative Party with which a Minister could curry favour by bringing forward measures to dock off thousands of the regular Army and replace them with associations of patriotic amateurs. He was one of these Conservatives. There were, before the war, certain old hands who were considered to have a vested right to a seat in the Cabinet when their Party was in power. They were like the

RHODA'S CAPTIVITY

servants let with a furnished house in Mayfair for the London season ; they were wasteful, lethargic, offensive, and emphatically not worth their wages for any reason except one—that they knew how houses were conducted in the grand manner—for the benefit of the servants ; they knew the etiquette of flunkeydom.

He got into the Cabinet in the usual way. His family had been noble and wealthy since a beautiful ancestress had preferred being Charles II.'s mistress to being anyone else's wife—though that came in good time. They had lived in the proper etiquette prescribed by their servants ever since. Their first essays in politics had been as courtiers, who were appointed to this or that office in the Government as a job, and accepted it as a means of plundering the nation. In the eighteenth century they became one of the great political families of the Whig Oligarchy. Early in the nineteenth, they went over to the Tories in the Whig Exodus. After this, they were not so sure-footed. They did not follow Grey in the Reform Bill ; and they did follow Peel in Free Trade, which was fatal to self-respecting Tories, since Free Trade is the Policy of Pander, and refusing to pander is the chief plank in Tory respectability.

In spite of this, it was an axiom of the Tory creed that the Lord Vanstry of the time, or his eldest son, should have a seat in the Cabinet when they were in power, unless he was a criminal or a lunatic, and this Lord Vanstry, so far from being an undesirable, had done all that the Dons of his College ask of any man at Oxford—taken a First in Mods and Greats, and been President of the Union Debating Society. They elected him a Fellow without examination, lest some other College should snap up this future Prime Minister. They had been all the readier to do so, since his unlimited means compelled him to take the Fellowship without any salary, so that they did not use up a "coupon" on him.

Starting life as a Lord, a Cræsus, and a Fellow of Balliol, his rise in the Conservative Party was meteoric. Fortunately for him, he sat in the House of Commons for many years, as Lord Drinkwater, before he became

PAUL'S WIFE

Earl of Vanstry, and, being a brilliant speaker, established his title to any position, though so far priority had blocked his way to the Premiership. In Opposition, as he was at present, he was the most powerful Conservative leader, because he was the only man who combined outstanding ability with an outstanding pedigree, and his brilliant orations, when he summed up the energy to make them, were as eagerly read as Kipling articles in *The Telegraph*.

Since Party Government had arrived at a deadlock, and the Conservative lives between him and the Premiership were better (from the actuary's point of view only, of course) than his own, he considered that the time had come for him to bring about a bloodless revolution in his own favour by substituting a Parliamentary Group System, with himself as its Premier, for the system of pandering to which Party Government had been reduced.

So far, so good. The flaw was that he had not sufficient energy to create a revolution against Party Government or build up the new system if Party Government was obliterated. He must find the proper instruments for that. He did not care if he did not *govern* the country if he could be Prime Minister and take all the credit and all the patronage. He was quite content to follow in the footsteps of his collateral ancestor, the Duke of Newcastle, who was Secretary of State for thirty years and Prime Minister for seven—in other words, to find a set of reforms which a majority of the Members of Parliament, released from their old Party ties, and ranging themselves in groups to press their own hobbies, from Tariff Reform to Conscription of Wealth, could agree to support. A was to support B and C's bills in return for B and C supporting his, and all of them were to unite in keeping their go-between, Lord Vanstry, in office as Prime Minister.

Lord Vanstry was shrewd enough to know that in the twentieth century such an arrangement could not last more than a few months, if it confined its operations to the mere exchange of bribes. It must have a cry and a strong man to sound it. For one thing, the walls of

RHODA'S CAPTIVITY

Jericho—that was the present Administration—would not fall without a tremendous fanfare of trumpets, and for another, newspaper support could only be secured by a strong programme. The prime change in politics which the decent newspapers demanded was the expulsion of the money-changers from the temple. Therefore something must be done to make his project appear not a pooling of interests to give him the Premiership, but a jettisoning of the shibboleths of Party to enable the moderate men of all creeds to unite in forming a strong National Party.

In Paul Wentworth he saw a heaven-sent instrument. Here was a life-long Liberal, one of the “people,” a board-school boy Prime Minister, who had just washed his hands of British Liberalism for its neglect of the national safety, and had done nothing to throw in his lot with the Conservatives, beyond contesting Surrey as an Independent Liberal, and addressing red-hot meetings for the Universal Service League.

He decided to invite Paul to be his Chief of Staff in the new crusade. If Paul consented, the agent of Lord Vanstry's Kentish properties was to give up his seat in the House of Commons to him, and further promises were made for the future. Paul wrote to Rhoda :

“Lord Vanstry has done me the honour, greatly in excess of my deserts in this country, to offer me the leadership in the House of Commons of the new Patriotic Party which he is about to form, and Stuckley, the agent of his Kent properties, is to resign a safe Kent seat, if I accept, so that I may get into the House without delay. But I cannot get any undertaking out of him to include a Universal Service Bill as a plank of his new Party, and I feel that if I accept without this assurance, I shall be taken right away from Universal Service to look after his crusade. He might almost be doing it on purpose to give Universal Service its *quietus*, because, however undeservedly, I am the chief orator of the U.S.L. Whenever they have one of their big Albert Hall or Queen's Hall demonstrations, I am the speaker of the evening, and I was the one sent to unfurl

PAUL'S WIFE

the flag of Universal Service in the various great cities of the North. The League has not enough men sprung from the people, like myself. Most of the aristocracy are in favour of Universal Service without being asked. It is the workers who need converting. They think that it will interfere with their liberty, that it will interfere with their learning their trade, that they will be drafted off like sheep. They dread the service more than they disapprove of it.

"I must make a U.S.L. measure a *sine qua non*, or I shall fall away under the cares of this world—that is, of Lord Vanstry."

A few days later he wrote :

"My position has become very difficult. Lord Vanstry has been obdurate ; so have I—*magnis componere parva*. He still entreats me to take that seat and the new Party's leadership in the Commons, but the question is, which way does duty lie ? At first glance it seems undoubtedly my duty to refuse. It must be immoral to come into fame, or I should say, prominence, as the advocate of a reform for which there is a crying need, and then to accept a seat in the House of Commons on condition that I let it lie dormant.

"Why he wants me to do so is, he explained, because opposition to Universal Service is the one thing which would be more calculated than anything else to unite the heterogeneous groups in the House of Commons, whom he expects to combine in the new Party. He says that with my help on platforms he can rouse such a feeling in the country that he will be able to free it from the futile Government which is going to deliver us bound hand and foot into the power of Germany, and that since nothing else can do it except a combination of this sort, he urges me to give up my crusade of Universal Service.

"My duty is to Universal Service, and though it is possible that we might achieve something for the Empire by helping Lord Vanstry to overthrow this Government—which I doubt—I do not think that anything

RHODA'S CAPTIVITY

will do so much towards saving the Empire as Universal Service. And I am sure that this Government would never introduce Universal Service, so it will be got rid of that way if we achieve it, though not perhaps so soon. But write me what you think."

Rhoda, in her replying letter, wrote :

"My Paul, I cannot advise you. I so long to see you in Parliament and a leader over here, that, like a woman, always looking at the first row, I say, 'Accept Lord Vanstry's offer.' But, having said this, I exercise my woman's privilege—change my mind—and say, 'Be true to yourself, be not led into temptation, but—to adapt one of my mother's religious tags—"persevere unto the end and so attain the crown of (your) life."'

"You must do as you feel, Paul. You have enjoyed too many political triumphs to need the distinction. What is it to be Lord Vanstry's Chief of Staff when you have been a Prime Minister? But, if your country needs you, you must not refuse because you cannot have your own way. One must learn to serve in order to rule. Isn't that what the proverb says? Seeing so much of mother and so little of anyone else, I am getting very taggy. She does not relent, I see, though she loves me and likes you. Isn't it absurd for a woman of twenty-six, who has before this been consulted by Cabinet Ministers about politics, practically to be locked up in her room because she has fallen in love with a man her parents don't approve of—though they do approve of him frightfully in another way, and know in their hearts that he is the biggest man in the Empire, and would welcome him for a son-in-law, were it not for certain disabilities?

"My love is of a peculiar and most inoffensive kind. Even my parents would recognize its inoffensiveness, if only they could be made to understand. I hope they believe that no philandering has ever passed between us. Why can't they recognize that all I want is to be with you all day long, hearing your great accents, undisturbed by the trivialities of other people's conversa-

PAUL'S WIFE

tion? Why can't our minds leave our bodies and go about with the other minds they like best? It isn't my mind that father and mother are bothering about, but the human casket that contains it. It is the casket that must be kept on a safe shelf, not the treasure which it was formed to contain.

"But I am getting prosy. Adieu, Paul. Keep me always in your thoughts when they are not needed for your country. Then *my* thoughts will be less lonely."

Paul refused Lord Vanstry's offer, on the ground that the Universal Service League had the greater need for his energies. His refusal was followed by an intrigue whose discreditability was lost sight of in its incredibility. Lord Vanstry had got on partly by his eloquence and brains, partly by his wealth and family connections, and partly by the instinct he possessed for picking out subordinates of genius, whose achievements he placed to his own credit. Paul might well have been flattered by the persistence with which Lord Vanstry had disregarded his refusal, but the peer was obsessed with the idea that Paul was the one man possessed of the requisite force and training for the crusade against Party Government. When Paul frustrated his plans by refusing to drop his own crusade, Lord Vanstry set to work to force his hand by intriguing him out of the Universal Service League. The task was not so impossible as might be imagined, because a large section of the U.S.L. were paralysed at the idea of its being put into practice immediately. They did not think the country was ripe for any such change. They wanted to talk about it for years before it was brought forward as a Government measure in Parliament. They were not sure whether they really wanted it or not; they were quite sure that they did not want it at once. They demanded due deliberation. They were frightened to think that they had a man of Lloyd George's energy on their own side.

Therefore when Lord Vanstry set in motion the movement which was designed to terminate Paul Wentworth's connection with the League he had plenty of materials to work upon. He had no ill-feeling against Paul; he

RHODA'S CAPTIVITY

liked his personality, and thought it most valuable for the work he had in hand. But he wanted Paul for his Chief of Staff, and he did not mean to allow Paul's sentimental preference for the Universal Service League to interfere with his plans. He naturally did not appear in the matter. He used men like Joseph Tapson, who had joined the League because they were busybodies and thought it would confer the notoriety which was, Lady Lyonesse said, as the breath in their nostrils, on them. They had been disappointed with the results, because when the sincere people took it up with enthusiasm, they were left gasping in the rear, like the storekeepers in an Australian gold-rush. But like the storekeepers, they were sure to make themselves felt later on, when things were established and the bolder spirits were fallen by the way or in harness. Nor was the occasion wanting for bringing matters to a head. Paul obligingly supplied that. He was bent on forcing the Government to introduce a Universal Service Bill in the present session. The state of the country undoubtedly needed it. The invasion of England depended on Germany's pleasure if a disaster could be inflicted on the British fleet at the opening, as had happened to the Russians at Port Arthur.

Lord Vanstry meant to have Paul at any price. He asked Tapson and a few of the other stick-in-the-muds of the U.S.L. to dinner at Vanstry House. They knew what they were going for. Tapson was instructed to tell them. Everything was done in a perfectly above-board fashion. There was no need to work underground. The Conservative leaders wished to rally the moderates of the U.S.L. round them, so as "to prevent the interests of the country being injured by premature agitation." This, in other words, meant the earnest efforts of men like Paul and John St. Barbe to make the country set its defences in order. Tapson and Co. all felt an honest glow of duty as they undertook a canvas of the U.S.L. to substitute a policy of marking time for the St. Barbe-Wentworth programme. "It was not English," they said, "this haste." They were quite right; it was most un-English to shut the stable door before the horse was stolen. They looked to the Provincial branches to effect their

purpose. The Provincial branches were not so affected by Paul's dominating personality as the London branches. He had been to a few of the largest towns, like Manchester, once; the rest had depended entirely on local effort, and as the yokels were not easily converted, it would not be hard in most cases to convince the local executives that the time was not yet ripe for definite action. Even Paul doubted if it was ripe. But he and John St. Barbe were straining every effort to make it ripe. The Constitution of the League enacted that if so many branches demanded an Extra General Meeting it could be called by notices fixing a day not less than one week ahead. Mr. Tapson got the requisite number of requisitions easily, especially as he said that a patriotic member of the League was willing to pay the railway expenses of the delegates in coming up to town, and the meeting was fixed for that day fortnight. The patriotic individual was Lord Vanstry, though his name did not appear. He likewise paid all expenses, hotel as well as railway, of Tapson and the other conspirators of the Universal Service League who visited the various country branches to whip up supporters for the great motion at the Extra General Meeting.

Though it was all done so openly—with the exception of withholding Lord Vanstry's name—neither Paul nor John St. Barbe heard anything of the agitation, beyond the fact that an Extra General Meeting had been demanded to discuss the situation under the new Government. The general office in London, and the chief London branches, had wisely been left alone. There the Wentworth-St. Barbe influence appeared on the surface omnipotent. In voting, fortunately for the conspirators, a big, active London Branch counted no more than Little Pedlington, with its handful of crotcheteers. As the Central Executive of the League had no voting power at a General Meeting, much the most important thing to do with its members was to keep them in the dark. Which was done.

When the hour fixed for the Extra General Meeting arrived, Mr. Tapson, as its convener, arose, and called upon the Duke of Dulverton to bring forward the motion.

RHODA'S CAPTIVITY

He was one of the people who was most disappointed at not having cut a greater figure in the League. He was one of the great landlords of the country, who performed all his duties to his estates excellently, and in case of an actual invasion he would have fought as a private soldier, if he could not have served his country in any other capacity. His popularity and well-known patriotism made him an excellent person on whom to rally the country delegates. The view he expressed was that old England had some fight left in her yet; that it was a mistake to do anything in a hurry; that it was only a confession of our weakness; and above all, that it would hamper the Government very seriously if things were pressed by the Universal Service League at the present moment. He therefore moved . . . etc., etc.

Paul answered him with an impassioned denial of the charge that they wished to hamper the Government in any way. They wished to help them. They wished to put them at the head of a Nation-in-Arms, which would keep them in power for many a long day. The Government would then have no more loyal supporters than the Executive of the Universal Service League. John St. Barbe spoke in the same strain later on. But the delegates had made up their minds before they came, and in any case, the Duke of Dulverton, speaking to them as the hereditary type of John Bull, appealed more than Paul or John St. Barbe, speaking as the new type of Conservative statesman, who maintained that in a political scramble with the German Emperor at one end and Mr. Lloyd George at the other, we must move like an automobile and not like a landau drawn by two fat horses; that this was the age of the clever young chauffeur, not of the old family coachman. At the conclusion of the meeting a vote was carried of such a nature that the members of the Executive present at once rose and tendered their resignations, to take effect as soon as a fresh election could be arranged. And the recalcitrants elected a provisional committee, with the Duke of Dulverton as its chairman, to aid in carrying out the election.

PAUL'S WIFE

That evening Paul received a fresh message from Lord Vanstry, urging him to accept his offer. He judged that Paul in his disappointment at the turn things had taken at the U.S.L. might jump at this other opportunity of usefulness. But Paul took it in a different way. He despaired of a country in which an institution like the Universal Service League could deliberately commit suicide in order to let the leaders of the Party most favourable to it slacken their efforts. *Cui bono?* he cried, in the bitterness of his soul. He would leave English politics to stew in their own juice, as he had left Australian politics. He wrote in this vein to Rhoda. He was paralysed by her reply.

CHAPTER XXI

RHODA'S HEGIRA

RHODA'S letter was almost brutally to the point.

"DEAREST PAUL,

"Our correspondence has been discovered, and my parents have decided to spirit me away from England for months in a yacht. I cannot contemplate life without you. Either you must take me away from them or I shall destroy myself. Do you love me enough to take me, Paul? I know all that it means. Mizpah.

"Your broken-hearted

"RHODA.

"P.S.—Meet me at Victoria to-night at the 9 p.m. for Paris. I shall wear my maid's clothes and be very closely veiled. You will know me by the bunch of real narcissus pinned in my hat. Bring plenty of money with you, as I shall have to buy clothes and luggage in Paris. I can pay you back. I have an income of my own. Buy a second-class ticket for me, and give me orders as if I was your wife's maid."

This letter was delivered to Paul in the morning by a footman of Lord Lyonesse's whom he subsequently discovered to have been discharged. The man insisted

RHODA'S HEGIRA

on delivering it into his own hands. When the man had gone away he rang the bell, and ordered that lunch should be served to him in his study, as he frequently did when he happened to be busy. The issues were so immense that he wished to talk to himself out loud about them, as he did when he was preparing his speeches. It meant political extinction, he was sure of that. But he had just made up his mind to turn his back on politics. Now that he was urged to pronounce the final *No*, he asked himself, did he mean it? Lord Vanstry had made him an offer unparalleled in British politics. If he accepted it, his political fortunes in the Old Country were made. Lord Vanstry was in the Upper House; he would have to lead the attack in the House of Commons on the greatest issue which had ever come up before the British Parliament—the abolition of Party Government. The ball was at his feet. Then there was his position as a decent, respectable member of society to be considered. Until that letter arrived a few minutes ago, no idea of joining the band of social outlaws had ever entered his head. Rhoda St. Ives was the love of his life, but he had never contemplated her entering more into his life than a good friend might enter. The strained position of the last few months had been brought about by injudicious interference and a high-spirited girl's resentment of it. He had no desire to "carry on," to use the pretty housemaid's expression, with the daughter of a friend; he merely wished to enjoy the society of a very charming and clever girl as much as he could without causing unpleasantness. He had never taken any liberty with her, or wished to do so. It was much ado about a mistake, and it was obvious that it had not caused his wife any pain, because she had shown a distinct liking for the girl and always welcomed her presence. His wife—that was another question. He owed much to Vivien for marrying him, and nothing at all for the way in which she had behaved during most of the time since they had been married. He told himself that she had not sullied his name as he was asked to sully hers. That was true. But it was many years since she had given him the least wifely affection, and it was idle to suppose that

PAUL'S WIFE

it would make any difference to her happiness if he left her. The extent of her private fortune eliminated money from the consideration. With Vicky it was different; she undoubtedly would feel it very keenly, but he had settled a handsome income on her. Was he bound to place his sister's happiness above his own? In this matter, her happiness and his were not on the same plane.

That it was wrong in the ordinary acceptance of the word was quite plain, but Paul was not a religious man; that it meant ecstatic happiness for him was equally plain. To a man who did not believe in any future state, could there ever be anything to make up for the loss of so much delight? Then he came to the real crux of the matter. Lord and Lady Lyonesse had been good to him, and he would be robbing them of their only child. This was breaking the Eighth Commandment as well as the Seventh, and he had always considered that the Eighth formed the most important part of the Seventh. But the devil reminded him that if he did not go away with Rhoda, Rhoda had said that she would kill herself. And as Rhoda had written *Mizpah*, she would do it. If Death robbed them of their daughter, the treasure could never be recovered, but if it was only he, Paul Wentworth, who carried off the treasure, they might some day in some way receive back the enjoyment of it, even without his having to relinquish it. . . . He persuaded himself that her elopement with him was much the less of the two evils. But still he hesitated.

Suddenly the door opened, and the maid—the household still adhered to maid-servants—announced Lord Vanstry. Lord Vanstry came to urge his acceptance. Paul did not know the part Lord Vanstry had taken in ousting him from the Universal Service League, but the peer showed too clearly that he meant to force him into acceptance. And he was too much the patron. He could not realize that Paul was a bigger man than himself by a great deal. In his own mind he was a little god—a regular member of Conservative Cabinets, and Paul was a Colonial politician in quest of an English career. Paul was polite, because he recognized how grand and unusual the offer must seem to Lord Vanstry, but he

RHODA'S HEGIRA

declined it with a firmness and an absence of hesitation which paralysed the peer. For to Paul's mind now it seemed like choosing between Rhoda and Lord Vanstry. The other personages in the case had dropped out.

And Lord Vanstry was falling into the pitfall which he had dug for another. One thing Paul could not have sacrificed for Rhoda, and that was the work he had built up at the Universal Service League. But this Lord Vanstry's intrigue had rooted up and flung on the dust-heap. It was Lord Vanstry's own action which had left Paul free.

Lord Vanstry was very tenacious ; he would not take no for an answer ; he stayed on and on, until at last Paul said, " I have business with my bankers which I must transact this afternoon, so I must beg you to excuse me. My bank is in the City, and it closes at four. Please don't think me rude."

Lord Vanstry took it as an excuse, and shaking hands very cordially, bowed himself out. He did not confess himself beaten yet. But Paul went into the City and drew out gold and circular notes for five hundred pounds. He also, under pledge of secrecy, told his banker that he might be away for some time on an affair of very great importance—which the banker took to be political—arranged for the cheques for housekeeping to be paid to his sister as usual, and for the banker to advance Vicky any unforeseen sums which she might require, and said that he would send him from Paris the address to which his letters were to be forwarded. His Australian correspondence came through the bank.

Lord Vanstry had cast the die by talking on and on while Paul should have been reflecting, and by awakening the antagonistic spirit in Paul. When Paul got back only Vicky was at home. He told her concisely what had happened about Lord Vanstry's offer ; he had already fully discussed the split at the U.S.L. with her. He declared that he should not think of joining him in the face of his attitude towards Universal Service, and that Lord Vanstry was plaguing him so that he should take a trip on the Continent to get away from him and to get over his disappointment about Universal Service. He

PAUL'S WIFE

should start by the night-train. Would Vicky have his trunk packed—a blue serge suit, a tweed suit, and his dress-clothes, and enough linen and underclothing to last him a week? He did not know what his address would be until he got to Paris, and he did not want anyone to see him off. He did not wish his departure to be noticed. Vicky received his instructions without comment, except that, observing that he had on a frock-coat, she asked if he would not need a hat-box.

“No, I’m going to change into tweeds before I go.”

Vivien had not come in yet, and in any case he knew that she would not see him off—even if he asked her to. Later on a telephone arrived that she and Freddy were dining in town and going on to a theatre. So Paul and Vicky had an early dinner alone.

“You look worried, Paul. I don’t much like your going off alone in this way. You’re sure you won’t have a break-down?”

“Of course not. Besides . . . I’m going with a friend.”

“Another victim of Universal Service?”

“Yes.”

“Where are you going to meet him? At the station?”

“Yes.” Paul had to indulge himself in the untruth.

“Oh, that’s all right then,” said Vicky, quite relieved. She did not ask the friend’s name—the attitude of the model sister; Paul would have volunteered it if he had wished to. “Shall you be back in a week, Paul?”

“No, I don’t think I shall. But I’ll let you know from Paris when I have talked it over with my friend.”

“What fun you’ll have! I think I’m rather glad you’re going, though I shall miss you. You haven’t had a real holiday for ever such a time, and it’s so giddy of you, going off *en garçon* in this way.”

“I feel frightfully giddy!” said Paul, rousing himself. “Oh, by the way, I asked the bank to send you your housekeeping cheque every Monday morning while I am away, and told them to let you have any money you want.”

“It’s just like you, Paul—as careful for my wants as if you were going to be away for six months.”

RHODA'S HEGIRA

"Little sister, we've been alone and the biggest friends ever since we were children."

"And we always shall be, Paul. Nothing could ever separate us."

"I wonder?" he said to himself. Just before he got up from dinner he ordered a small bottle of champagne—his favourite brand of Bollinger—to be opened. He held up his glass for Vicky to clink hers against it. "Little sister," he said, "here's to our next merry meeting!"

"And it will be a merry meeting. I expect you to come back as brown as you used to be in Australia."

"I expect I shall be!" he said gaily, for suddenly the wave of excitement caught him. In ever such a little time—between half-an-hour and an hour—the newer and fuller life for which he thought the world well lost was to begin for him. Even now she must be thinking of starting, as he was. Then he had to wonder what Vicky would say when she heard, and he said to her, "Will you promise me never to think any worse of me, whatever you hear, Vicky?"

"You will always be the hero of my life, Paul."

"Well, remember that—it's almost time to say good-bye."

Few of the people who were streaming into the Clara Butt concert at the Albert Hall on that side could have noticed the tall, dark man stooping to kiss the beautiful fair girl as he stepped into his motor, and of those, perhaps everyone would have taken the parting for something more romantic than a brother's ordinary good-bye to a sister. And it was, though the parting was lightly taken.

When he reached the platform a very neat lady's maid came up to him. "What orders have you for me, sir?"

He could not help starting at hearing those words in that voice, but no one was near enough to notice. On a roughish night in winter there are not many Channel passengers. "Here is your ticket. You will find a composite corridor carriage, half first, half second, at the back of the train. Take your seat in that. Your mistress and I will be in another compartment of the same carriage, in case you want anything. You will share a

PAUL'S WIFE

cabin with your mistress on the boat, and your seat in the train at Calais is numbered, the same number as your ticket. Is that your bag ? ”

“ Yes, sir. I have registered my box through to Paris.”

“ I think you had better go and get into your carriage now—there is nothing more for you to do until your mistress comes,” he said, in case anyone should overhear ; but there was no one near enough. “ It is the last carriage.”

“ Yes, sir.”

He had left his own things—bag, rugs and trunk—with a porter in the weighing-room, and went back to register the trunk. No one recognized either of them, and their journey was an uneventful one. Paul hoped against hope that there might be no other passengers in the composite corridor carriage. There was only one, and he came in at the last minute—an innocent-looking old foreigner. But Paul determined to run not one unnecessary risk, so he did not go into Rhoda's compartment until they were sufficiently near Dover for it to be natural that he should be giving her directions, and even then he contemplated seeing the other passenger peeping through the door—a detective in disguise—so he said nothing beyond the directions, and Rhoda did not lift her veil. But he handed her the love-letter which he had been writing all the way from London, the loveliest letter she had ever received, taken up not with protestations of passion, but with deep thankfulness and plans for the perfect life. Rhoda read it in her bunk, as the boat tossed its way across the Channel, and thanked God for the strength it gave her.

Before the boat got in she wrote him an answer. There were some loverisms in her letter, and a most important suggestion—that they should take the early morning train for Italy, which would land them in Turin before midnight. Paris would perhaps be the first place her father would think of when he missed her in the morning, and he would be sure to set the police in motion. But if they took this train they would be well on their way before he began to do anything. This was flat common sense, so when Paul had read the letter, he turned up the train

RHODA'S HEGIRA

in his Cook's Handbook, and wrote out the directions as to what she should do when they reached Paris. There was fortunately a Turin carriage, with first and second and sleeping compartments, on their train. He took a two-berth sleeping compartment for her from its attendant, though they would be at Turin before bedtime, and he told the man to make up the bed, as the lady would be very tired after her night journey. He wished her to have all the rest she could, and it was the easiest way of escaping observation. He himself would be too excited to sleep. He had to guard against surprises, and he seemed to have the thinking of a year to do in one day.

When he had found a porter to carry her bag for her to the Italian carriage—he longed to carry it himself to do her a service, but was afraid it might attract attention—he got another porter to transfer his own hand-packages to the first-class compartment adjoining the sleeping compartment, and directed her to look after them in the most matter-of-fact tone. Then he went off to the baggage-office to hand in the checks for their trunks and re-register them for Turin. There was plenty of time. The through-carriage did not start its wanderings round the *Ceinture* railway to the Gare du Lyon for nearly half-an-hour. It required strong self-restraint to prevent his going and talking to her, as the suburban train, with the Italian carriage attached, dragged its slow course round Paris. But politics had taught him self-restraint, and he was practical. If they were going to be together all their lives, as he hoped and trusted they were, why imperil the result for less than one day? He did not go as far as the door of her compartment either on the *Ceinture* or at the Gare du Lyon, and when they steamed out of the Gare du Lyon and resumed their journey southwards, he took his meals on the *wagon-lit* restaurant after she had finished hers.

He hardly noticed externals, though the train flew past such sights as the glorious Gothic cathedral of Sens; the rich slopes of the Côtes d'Or hills, on which the finest wines of Burgundy are grown; Dijon, with the roofs of three centuries vying with each other in picturesqueness;

PAUL'S WIFE

the lake of Aix and the mountain-girdled valleys of the South; the distant peaks of Savoy. His mind kept harking back over his whole political career now that there was no forward vision, and this backward vista included the political career which he had imagined for himself in England.

As the train began to climb the Alps the darkness closed on it. At Modane all sorts of unlikely people began to talk to each other; a troublesome customs' house can make any two people friends or enemies. It was nothing for Paul to be helping an unprotected Englishwoman, especially of the servant class, and therefore, perhaps, unable to speak French, to clear her baggage. As a matter of fact it was she who spoke French, not he. And when they were in the train again, it was natural for him to go on talking to her, as they were both alone. But he was still careful. He only spoke to her through the open door of her compartment, standing with his own back against the corridor window facing it, so that he could see anybody coming into the car from either end, or out of one of the other compartments. And he only conversed on detached and ordinary subjects, natural with a fellow-passenger. It was sufficient that he could feast his eyes on her disguised form and tell himself that she was his.

"Do you know anything about Turin hotels?" he asked.

"There are a lot of big hotels round the station, but there isn't much quiet or privacy about them."

"Do you know any other?"

"Once when we were in Turin we went to see the pictures of an artist who was staying at the *Castello*, the funniest old place, in a courtyard off the Piazza Castello. It had large, cool rooms, and a lot of Empire furniture, and there seemed to be only about two people staying in the whole place."

"I want a quiet place."

"Well, try that."

This was a type of their conversations, and Rhoda kept her veil down. Veiled so closely and in her maid's hat and long travelling coat, scarcely any of the familiar lineaments were recognizable, even to the eyes of affec-

MARRIED IN SIGHT OF GOD

tion. To the ordinary eye her identity was completely concealed. And so, about midnight, they came to royal Turin, deserted of its dynasty, and, as soon as their baggage was "cleared," drove off to the *Albergo del Castello*, concerning whose whereabouts the cabman had to consult with his fellows.

CHAPTER XXII

MARRIED IN SIGHT OF GOD

THE Piazzas of Turin looked very stately and restful in the moonlight as they drove through the quiet street at the back of the Piazza del Castello, which contained the entrance to the hotel. But the Via Roma was almost deserted, so there was little to excite their comment. They fell to natural small talk; by mutual but unexpressed consent, they waited for the great talk until they should be alone and undisturbed.

"How did you manage to get your trunk out of the house?"

"It was a trunk that belonged to my maid, and I was supposed to have given her the things which were packed in it. As she was sent away for bringing me your letters, she bore my mother no love, and I had given her twenty pounds to compensate her for the loss of her place."

"Did you take her into your confidence?"

"I had to. I had to get the hat and coat and veil from her, and instruct her to be seen coming back to the house just before I left, and to stay in my room with the door locked until nine o'clock this morning, when she was to come out and tell my father and mother that I had run away."

"With me?"

"No, I told her to say that she did not know where I had gone, or if I had gone with anybody."

"And she packed your trunk for you and got it out of the house?"

"Yes. That was her idea. It's not one of my trunks, but one that mother gave her because she took a dislike to it."

PAUL'S WIFE

"Have you got enough things in it?"

"Enough things in it? What a lovely expression, dear Paul! Yes, I've got enough things in it to carry me on until I buy some more ready-made, if I get them directly we arrive at . . . Where are we going?"

"I don't know. I was going to settle when we got to Paris, but we rushed on to Turin."

"Oh, well, we won't settle that now. Hats I can buy in Turin—Italy always buys its hats in Turin."

Paul thought that they might have some difficulty in gaining admission at that hour, but the hotel had a café which spread its chairs far out into the Piazza in summer, and even in winter had its patrons late into the night in its *salone*. So the landlord came forward at once. As Paul knew not a word of any language but his own, and Rhoda spoke Italian glibly, the arrangements with the landlord were left to her. She ordered bedrooms leading off each other, and supper in twenty minutes' time in a private sitting-room as near the bedrooms as possible. There was one *en suite*.

In twenty minutes she emerged, much scrubbed, looking as neat as a new pin, in a fascinating tea-robe. Shortly afterwards she was joined by Paul, who had had a cold bath, and bore obvious traces of having hurried into a suit crumpled with packing—that is the difference between man and woman. She also wished to get the maid's costume in which she had arrived out of the memories of the hotel people; they were to think that it was merely due to the plainness of the English taste in travelling.

Directly Paul came into the room she held out her arms to him. She imagined that the waiter would be late; and she was willing to chance being caught by him. From henceforth no concealment was necessary. She meant to live with Paul openly before God and man. It was their first kiss. He folded her to his heart, and kissed her as he had never kissed Vivien, beautiful though Vivien was! They hardly spoke. Each knew what the other meant to say.

The waiter was discreetly noisy in the passage. When he came in, Rhoda said, "We ought by rights to drink

MARRIED IN SIGHT OF GOD

champagne, but you couldn't swallow the execrable stuff they would have here. But they might have a good bottle of foaming Barbera. I'll ask them to bring their very best."

The waiter brought an admirable bottle, with the stimulus of champagne, the softness and generousness of Burgundy, and in that they christened their union. The window of the sitting-room looked out on the old Castle of Madama, which gives the Piazza its name. It looked exquisitely romantic in the soft white light, with its two great mediæval towers, plain almost to ugliness as it is by day. To the landlord the castle was always fine, so there was a sofa a few feet from the window, commanding the view. They sat down on it for a short while to realize that they were in Italy, and to be able, as they said, to admire the view to the landlord. But each had something to say to the other that would not brook delay.

Paul was willing that Rhoda should lock her door to him until he was divorced and could marry her. He had come away with her without any idea of claiming that she should be his mistress *de facto*, though the world was bound to place its own interpretation on their relationship. He was even willing to live with her platonically for all time. Rhoda, in running away with him, had been quite devoid of passion. She had done it because life was intolerable to her without his daily companionship. She was a girl who had remained unusually innocent of sexual feelings. But she thought it neither logical nor fair to suggest that they should remain single when they were living together. She told him so frankly. And when his chivalrousness made him still hesitate, she said, "It must be to-night, Paul. If they catch us and try to separate us, it is all-important that this should have happened. Then they will not want to take me away from you; I could not bear to live without you." He was still unconvinced. "Don't you see that my father may be only a few hours behind us, and that I must be yours before he finds us?"

"Do you really mean it, Rhoda?"

"Of course I do, my husband."

PAUL'S WIFE

CHAPTER XXIII

PAUL'S WIFE

THE next morning broke into one of those beautiful days which you get in early winter in Italy. The sky was blue ; the day was mild ; the sun glittered gaily. It might have been spring that was advancing against winter. And there was spring in Rhoda's heart. She knew that what she had done was for her happiness. So long as she had Paul with her—and he must be steadfast ; he had stood Vivien's vagaries for twenty years with unruffled good-nature—the heavens might fall. Whatever her father and mother wrote or did, she would know that she had acted for the best. If none of her friends ever spoke to her again, she would not waste a reflection on them. She had Paul and she had Italy, inexhaustible Italy. Italy could supply her with fresh charms to enjoy with Paul for half a century, if Paul had not been sufficient in himself to interest her for an infinite period of time. No intellectual woman had ever explored Paul. His heart was full of virgin country. It was like his native continent, which has only a fringe round its sea-coast inhabited.

Far from feeling humiliated or regretful over the night, Rhoda felt exactly as if she was an impeccably-married wife on the first morning of her newly-found happiness. She was married to Paul in her own eyes, though he had another wife living and undivorced. For this condition of her mind her father was chiefly to blame. He had given her her political education, and her political education had been that all existing institutions were bad, having been made by the leading men of their time : that it was proper for any of them to be abrogated in any direction by anyone—any demolition of anything being a sacrifice on the altar of Liberty and the People. She had been taught that nothing was sacred in politics, except the right of the tail to wag the dog and she might be excused if she regarded

PAUL'S WIFE

the marriage laws as being as antiquated as other rights of Property. These were always spoken of as indefensible at the political receptions of Lord Lyonesse, the greatest property-holder in the county of Cornwall. Lord Lyonesse had been made a lord for the services which he had done to the Party of Revolution, and the curse he had promulgated had come home to roost. For evermore the ghost of Rhoda in the red cap of Liberty must haunt Lyonesse House.

Paul was standing in the window, looking out at the Castello di Madama, and the throng of people going to their work, chiefly artisans, when Rhoda came into the room, dressed rather simply, but with special care, and walked across to give him a wife's good-morning kiss.

"This day is the beginning of life for me, Paul!" She had used almost the identical words when she had given herself to him the night before; but that was a broken day. To-day she was beginning the serene round of life which she meant to continue until she died. She was rather uneasy about Paul's breakfast; Italians in small native hotels don't understand breakfasts. But she managed to get him a well-cooked steak and an omelette. She crowed over her success to him.

"You won't have to worry over my meals, dearest. I can eat anything or go without anything. A dozen or so of these rolls and butter, and as many as I could eat of these things"—he was munching the breadsticks which are Turin's speciality—"would have done me perfectly, so long as I had coffee *ad lib.*"

"Even coffee *ad lib.*, with milk, is not always easy, Paul."

"But the knowledge that you will always be at my breakfast-table will make up for anything."

Rhoda gave him a bride's look. All breakfast was a flirtation; they had arrears to make up; they had done no flirting in the days when Rhoda was getting into hotter and hotter water because she could not do without his companionship. When it was over and they were back at the window, having their cigarettes, Rhoda sketched out the programme of their stay. First she

PAUL'S WIFE

must telegraph to her father to tell him where she was. She had written him a long letter in the train between London and Dover, and posted it just before she stepped on board the boat, and had kept a copy of it to show to Paul.

"And I must telegraph to my bankers ; they are holding my letters."

"Secondly, we must go and buy hats, and a box for them to live in until we are settled in our home."

"All right."

"No ! Secondly, we must go to Cook's and get our tickets for Rome and our sleepers. Our train starts at three."

"Don't you want to stay any longer in Turin ? "

"Oh, Paul, do you think I'm going to run the risk of letting my husband be bored before we have been married a day ? "

He accepted her definition of their union gladly. It was so good for Rhoda to feel that she was his wife, though there were lengthy formalities of divorce to be got through before the law would accept her as such, even if Vivien put them in motion at once. And he was not sure that she would. Marriage made so little difference to her, and it might amuse her to play him like a fish. In any case, he did not care now, when Rhoda had gone through the ordeal unsullied in her mind and felt that she was his wife, with or without the sanction of the Registrar.

"And thirdly, we'll buy my hats."

"We've settled that. It's fourthly . . . ? "

"And fourthly—oh, Paul, we can't go to-day ! I forgot the picture-gallery and the Egyptian Museum and the Armoury and the imitation Mediæval castle. And why should we hurry when we have all our lives before us ? "

"Why should we ? "

"We must leave ourselves something to do," she said, suddenly turning grave, "because you won't be able to go into politics any more, my poor Paul ! We have committed the only crime which signifies in the career of a British politician." She adverted to it and

PAUL'S WIFE

played with it, because she saw from the utter contentment of his expression that he regretted nothing, and she meant to look facts in the face from the beginning. She thought that it would be so much better for both of them.

"Don't let's hurry," he said, with the indolent happiness which is the anodyne of a strenuous life. "We shall feel so foolish at having spent a day like this in the train if it is a wet day to-morrow."

"Oh, it won't be wet to-morrow. The weather doesn't change so suddenly as that in Italy, except for one little bit in the spring and the autumn."

"Then thank heaven for Italy! An Australian expects sunshine."

"Well, now for the telegram. One won't need a hat or one's walking-shoes to run across to the post-office in Italy—for the climate or the other thing."

"I think I'll have a hat," said Paul.

She wrote out the telegram, printing the letters so that there should be no mistake. "Lord Lyonesse, Park Lane, London. Leaving for Rome to-morrow. Will send Roman address. Rhoda Wentworth, Albergo del Castello, Turin." She handed it to Paul, who had telegraphed to his bankers to address him: "c/o Thomas Cook & Son, Rome," to read.

"Rhoda Wentworth!" he said, with gladness in his voice.

"Yes. I shall always sign myself *Rhoda Wentworth*."

"It will only be a matter of months before you have a legal right to the name.—*Pace Vivien!*" he added to himself.

With a woman's intuition she divined his thoughts. "That depends on Vivien. I am prepared for her to refuse."

"You have written that telegram to make your father follow us and have it out?"

"Yes."

"I wish that too, dear. There is nothing to be gained by leaving things in suspense."

"And now for hats!" said Rhoda, in a tone which suggested that the prospect of meeting her outraged

PAUL'S WIFE

father did not weigh on her spirits. Indeed, she felt so happy that nothing could depress her. She examined various palatial hat-shops—they occupy the ground-floors of palaces in Turin—and finally selected one. Before she went in, she said, “I hope you’re prepared to lend me lots of money, Paul !”

“I’m not prepared to lend you anything, Rhoda. But I am prepared to pay any price for my wife’s hats.”

“I am glad that you remembered to say ‘For my wife’s hats.’ I expect you always to speak of me as your wife in Italy. I am *your Italian wife*, and England belongs to a back number.”

“You are *my wife*, Rhoda.” The pavement in front of a Turin hat-shop was a strange place to settle so large a question. But the passers-by did not think them madder than other English people. Besides, it was a very old problem this—Madame setting her heart on a very expensive hat and Monsieur inquiring if such an expensive one is necessary. But this happened not to be the problem. It was the question of whether a wife with a private income would allow her husband to pay for her. And it was left in abeyance, the immediate necessity being a sufficiently consequential hat to replace the maid’s travelling hat which Rhoda had worn on her flight from London. As an adviser on hats Paul was a hopeless failure, but he experienced a tingle of pleasure at being allowed to pay for an article of Rhoda’s attire. It gave him such a proprietary feeling. And he enjoyed still more the sensation of taking their joint compartment in the *wagon-lit* for Rome. Rhoda was *his wife*, *his wife* !

Having bought three hats, none of them modest in proportions or price, Rhoda had to select a very large hat-box in the Via Roma. When railway-tickets, hats and hat-box were bought, it was twelve o’clock, and Rhoda insisted that Paul should try the Gourmets’ Restaurant, where they had typical Italian food of the very best—thrown away on Paul, who only enjoyed the grills, but appropriate to the occasion. Then, after an hour of siesta at their hotel, they went over the famous armoury of the Kings of Italy.

PAUL'S WIFE

Rhoda was interested in armour, for they had a good deal at their Cornish castle, inherited from knightly ancestors, and Paul, while he was listening to her enthusiasms over the splendid pieces in this museum, felt the pathos of the situation—that a woman of such ancestry should have given herself to him, the son of a Melbourne artisan, who could not even make her his wife until the humiliations of a divorce court had been experienced. Also, he wondered who would have the castle and armour of the St. Ives', now that Rhoda had forfeited them by her relations with him. He could not help feeling sad for Rhoda. But no such suggestions seemed to cross her own line of thought. For when the bell rang to announce that closing time had come, she said, "Now we'll taxi across and see the copy of a mediæval castle in the Park. It's awfully well done."

He was struck with the beauty of the building, as it rose above the rushing river. And as they wandered through its counterfeited halls, he asked, "Is Carbis anything like this?"

"No, Carbis is not so exaggeratedly mediæval. The châteaux of Piedmont have a sort of chalet element about them, from their being in a land of deep winter snows, which makes them very fantastic and picturesque. Carbis is a much larger place, with plainer lines, though some of it is very old."

"I should love to take a place like this for the summer."

"It's perfectly easy to find one to let furnished, though not quite so simple as in Germany. I know of one near Florence, and one near Siena—Tuscan style, of course, but it would suit our purpose as well."

"I don't think I should know the difference until you had coached me."

* * * * *

Rhoda had rather dreaded the time between dark and dinner, but when they reached the tea-place which their hotel-keeper had recommended, her doubts were relieved. It was very large and brilliantly lighted. A band was playing "The Chocolate Soldier," which was modern for Italy, and nearly every table was occupied by smart

Italians. The Torinese are the best dressed people in Italy—possibly because they are the nearest to Paris, geographically, with an excellent train-service. And there were officers innumerable of all arms of the service—Cavalleria, Fanteria, Artiglieria, not to mention the bold Bersaglieri, with their drooping plumes, and the Alpine Corps, with their stiff eagle-feathers. For Turin is the chief fortress of Italy, guarding the passes of the Alps. One of the officers, who was sitting at a little table by himself, for luck perhaps, gallantly got up and joined a group of his fellows a few yards away.

They all devoured Rhoda with their eyes when neither she nor Paul was looking at them. For not only was she beautiful and very well-dressed, but she was obviously absorbed in the tall, slim, sunburnt man, who did not seem to be quite of her class socially, but yet wore the air of a man accustomed to command. Tea was ordered, not coffee. Therefore they were English. And she had to ask him if he took sugar, and had therefore not been long married, if she was his wife. No one guessed what an interesting line of inquiry was being opened up here. For the same reason she could not be his daughter. It must therefore be a honeymoon. It was decided that the bridegroom was very rich—a man who had made a fortune in one of the ways in which the English do make a fortune in a tropical country, and that the young wife had married him for his money. In point of fact, Paul had accumulated over twenty thousand a year by his skill in speculations, but Rhoda would have some day inherited much more, if she had not forfeited her birthright. Of one thing there could be no doubt—that the beautiful young bride had a healthy appetite, for she made Paul go with her to the counter and choose a pile of the adorable Italian pastry and cakes. For himself he picked out the plainest. The officers questioned the waiter. He could only tell them that she spoke Italian like an Italian, which mystified things further. They began to make eyes at her, which were lost on her, for she was bent on amusing Paul, lest he should have one dull minute in their first day.

He was very entertained, for she pointed out the tricks

PAUL'S WIFE

—which are many—that Italian men and women have at restaurants, and there was a constant come and go. But nothing entertained him so much as Rhoda's appetite and bubbling happiness. It would have made little difference to him if the restaurant had been empty, except that the presence of the crowd kept him from straying into sentiment. The place grew hotter and hotter; the chatter grew louder and louder; the music tried to assert itself. It was the Italian's ideal "five o'clock."

Presently some English people came in, who knew both Rhoda and Paul. But the affair had not got into the newspapers yet, and they supposed that Lord and Lady Lyonesse and Vicky Wentworth were somewhere in Turin, together very likely taking an orthodox English tea at the hotel. At any rate, Rhoda and Wentworth were alone because they wanted to be alone. So they greeted the lovers cordially and passed on, making some remark on Rhoda's defiance of chaperonage. When they found an empty table and sat down, they wondered out aloud to each other what Lady Lyonesse could be doing to give a girl of Rhoda's position and prospects and beauty so much licence. But they meant to be just as cordial in their greeting if Rhoda and Paul were still sitting there when they passed out. Had Rhoda not made up her mind to meet her father in the open and fight the battle out, the rencontre might have made her anxious. For people in England in her set would certainly hear of it. But as she had sent the telegram to bring her father to Italy, the rencontre meant no more to her than it would have meant if her mother had been at the hotel. They stayed on at the restaurant until it was time to go back and dress for dinner.

For dinner, Rhoda, still thinking of keeping Paul amused, suggested another gay restaurant, though she did not mean to let him go to the theatre, knowing the depressing effect that an Italian theatre has on an Englishman who does not understand the language. But Paul was for dinner in their own hotel. He thought that Rhoda had done quite enough, and for himself he would rather dine with her quietly in their sitting-room than in

PAUL'S WIFE

the grandest restaurant in the world. So Rhoda, seeing that it was for his pleasure, gave in, though she was rather afraid of the dinner. She did not wish him to make the acquaintance of the nakedness of the land prematurely. For herself she did not care so long as she was with him. But if she had gone down into the dining-room at eight o'clock she would have known no fears, for it was full of officers, who are fond of their food, and had many little parties of well-dressed people. Any of them could have told her that the restaurant at the *Castello* was renowned. The prices were not high, but the food was as good as anywhere in Turin—that city of gourmands—the Dijon of Italy.

She allowed the landlord to send up the *table d'hôte* dinner. He was very anxious for them to try it, and it saved her the trouble of ordering. They said that they would dine at seven-thirty, but only she and Paul were ready at the hour appointed. They sat down on the sofa by the window. Turin is too near the Alps for the window to be left open in winter, but the shutters were not closed, and the Piazza was, after the manner of Italian Piazzas, such a blaze of electric light that everything was as plain as daylight. If anyone noticed them at the window, they would have excited inquisitive Italy's curiosity. For to dine in a private room at the *Castello* was the *dernier cri*, and Rhoda looked so beautiful, so distinguished, though the wardrobe which she had brought with her was restricted. The hotel chambermaid who helped her to dress with Italian adaptiveness, was in ecstasies over her underclothing. Rhoda St. Ives had been a very extravagantly brought-up young woman, in spite of all the socialistic sentiments which she rattled off her tongue at the Lyonesse House receptions, spoken of as "Lady Lyonesse's *salon*," to that Tory heart's disgust.

It did not signify how long the waiter kept them. Kisses, of the discreet order which do not disarrange the hair, are an excellent substitute for cocktails. And when the dinner came, it excelled all possible anticipations. The ideas were original, the materials good, the cooking admirable. The food was actually better than they

LADY LYONESSE CALLS ON VIVIEN

would have had at the much-lauded restaurant ; and there was that Barbera they knew to wash it down. The waiter brought in the courses and vanished ; there was a pear-bell hanging from the electric light over the table which, he said, would bring him in one minute with the next course. The next courses seemed innumerable to Paul, who wanted dinner to be over, so that he could talk without being disturbed. Long dinners were not in his line. A quarter of an hour had been his usual limit in the days of political stress. But he was not impatient, for his eyes could rest on Rhoda, who was looking lovelier than he ever remembered her. Is there any such beautifier as crowned love ?

CHAPTER XXIV

LADY LYONESSE CALLS ON VIVIEN

LORD LYONESSE'S yacht, *The Tristram of Lyonesse*, the finest ocean-going sailing-yacht in England, was lying at Tilbury, fully provisioned and equipped, under orders for Java. In less than twenty-four hours her owner, with his family and friends, would be on board, and the tug would be towing her down the river. The crew were in high spirits, for *The Tristram* spent most of her time anchored at Falmouth, a not very exciting port. But before the hour of departure, a telegram arrived for the Captain, postponing the sailing until further orders. For the Honourable Rhoda, in whose dishonour the whole expedition had been planned, was not to be found. The sentries—footmen and maids—who kept her imprisoned in Lyonesse House had been bribed or outwitted ; the bird had flown—whither no one knew. It must be caught before it could be transported to Java.

The actual instrument of the flight was easy to trace, because Marianne, Rhoda's maid, recently discharged by her mother, was in Rhoda's room and had passed the night in Rhoda's bed, borrowing Rhoda's best nightgown for the purpose. The servants who admitted her could be traced perhaps, but less easily ; the only person whose responsibility was not divided was the housekeeper, and it had been done while she was at the theatre. Marianne

was questioned and offered substantial rewards, which she accepted, for describing a *modus operandi* which incriminated no one. No orders had been given to refuse her admission to the house or to Rhoda's room, and, once in the house, it was natural for her to wish to go and see the imprisoned Rhoda, which she did so effectively. As to where Rhoda had gone, she was ignorant or incorruptible, and that, after all, was the rub. They did not suspect Rhoda of being disguised in Marianne's clothes, because none of her fellow-servants revealed that the clothes of Rhoda which she was wearing, and which she truly said that Rhoda had given her, were not the clothes in which she had come to the house. She allowed an envelope to be found on which she had written: "The Hon. Rhoda St. Ives, c/o Mrs. Mullion, Carbis, St. Ives"—Mullion was a discharged employee, established by a trade-union at Carbis to disturb the workers on Lord Lyonesse's estate. When the land-agent at Carbis went to see them, the Mullions knew, or would disclose, nothing. Valuable time had been lost.

No one kept any watch on Paul's movements. He was not suspected. Freddy could have told them that he had gone, but Freddy, for reasons of his own, wanted him to be gone, and had he been consulted, would have done nothing which might bring him back. He was trying to marry Paul's sister, and thought that Paul would oppose it if he knew all the objections. He hoped to book Vicky securely while Paul was away.

The first intimation which they had of the elopement was Rhoda's telegram to her father to announce it, and give him her Turin address in full, promising their address in Rome when they got there. What Rhoda had done was unmistakable. Lady Lyonesse washed her hands of her for ever. Lord Lyonesse thought it would be better to try and get her back, and left for Turin by the 11 a.m. on the next day. If Rhoda had left the *Albergo del Castello* when he got there, he meant to stay there until her Roman address was telegraphed to him from England, or the Turin *padrone* received it. Turin was a day nearer than London to Rome. At the *Albergo* the English Milord said that the Signor Wentworth was his son-in-

LADY LYONESSE CALLS ON VIVIEN

law, who had gone on to engage a villa for him. The telegram was to be addressed to the *padrone*. His courier inquired from time to time if it had arrived.

No one knew of the scandal so far, except the Lyonesses themselves. Their friends supposed that Rhoda was more rigorously confined. Those who knew that she was going to be deported to Java might have supposed that her entreaties or protests had delayed the sailing. The divulgence might have been delayed indefinitely, unless not one, but two unsilenceable people had been concerned—Lady Lyonesse and Vivien. In a fatuous and reckless moment after her husband's departure, Lady Lyonesse thought that she ought to inform Vivien. She got Freddy to fix an appointment at the flat. When she arrived, she broke her news without any preparation. "Your husband has bolted with my daughter."

"He'll be good to her," said Vivien. "He's very honourable."

"Do you call that honour?"

"There's honour in that, as in other things. There isn't anything in which it's much more necessary."

Lady Lyonesse was almost stunned by the way in which she took it. Vivien waited for her to pull herself together. Though she did not show it, she was tickled to death by the situation. She would not have believed it of the sober-sided Paul. It reawoke her interest in him. If he had come back at that moment, he would have found her unusually affectionate. Lady Lyonesse was revived by a suspicion. "Did you know anything about it?"

"I? No. Paul never makes me his *confidante*. I shouldn't think that he would have told Vicky this, either."

"I shouldn't think he would!" said the peeress grimly. "Or she must be a curious young lady."

"She isn't. She would do for a bishop, if they had such things as lady-bishops."

"What shall you do?"

"Do? Nothing. Paul is sure to have arranged for the upkeep of the household. I have plenty of money of my own, in any case."

PAUL'S WIFE

"I'm not talking about your housekeeping, Mrs. Wentworth," said Lady Lyonesse impatiently. "I'm talking about the elopement."

"Oh, that! It doesn't concern me. Paul hasn't been anything to me for a long time, except my best friend, and that he will always be."

"After this?"

"Yes. It won't make him horrid to me. Nothing could affect his kindness or his sense of duty."

"His sense of duty!" shrieked Lady Lyonesse.

"His sense of duty. He won't change to me a bit, unless I make him, and I certainly shan't."

"Have you no sense of . . ." she was going to say "decency," but reflecting on Vivien's nature, she substituted, "vengeance?"

"Vengeance? I don't feel like that. He hasn't done me any injury."

"Hasn't done you any injury? What do you mean, my dear Mrs. Wentworth?"

"What I mean is that we did not live like husband and wife, and if I know anything of Paul, he feels kindlier to me at this moment than at any moment since he arrived in England."

"I don't understand you," said Lady Lyonesse coldly.

"I mean that he will be ashamed of himself and sorry for me, and, so, anxious to be a 'sport.'"

"I'm afraid I can't follow you, either in your language or your ideas."

"I didn't expect you to, and you needn't expect me to follow you. I can see red as ruddy as most people when I'm mad. I don't suppose that you're a patch on me, though you could do pretty well in your own line. But I don't see anything to be mad about here, and if I had to be mad with anyone, it would be with you, for making my husband leave me when he would have gone on being a good innocent friend to us all till the end of the chapter."

"Well, if it isn't madness, it's the most extraordinary piece of altruism that ever came to my notice."

"I can't say that it isn't 'altruism,' because I don't know what 'altruism' means. If you want to put it into four words, it's 'live and let live.'"

LADY LYONESSE CALLS ON VIVIEN

"Surely that isn't your notion of life, Mrs. Wentworth?"

"My notion of life is that I've got singularly little out of it for a woman who was born with so much 'looks' and so much money."

"I don't see how you can say that, considering that you married the greatest man in your country. I don't deny his greatness, though he stole my daughter's affections."

"I know I married him, but I didn't appreciate him, so what good did it do me? It's better to be born grateful than to be born lucky."

By a great effort Lady Lyonesse kept her temper. The possible value of Vivien as an ally was too great for her to run any risks. "I don't mind confessing, Mrs. Wentworth," she said, "that I am staggered by the way you look at it, but we may agree as to the action which is to be taken, though we are unable to agree in our judgment of the case."

"I shall divorce him," said the downright Vivien.

"Divorce him, when you condone his conduct and deplore his departure?" She was hoping to get her daughter back from Paul by Vivien's recapturing her husband.

"Yes, poor dear! He'll want his liberty, and he deserves it. And we shall be better friends."

"My goodness, what a woman you are! I've no patience with you!"

"Would it relieve your feelings to get into a temper with me? If it would, say what you like. I shan't bear you any ill-feeling for it. I shall think it only natural."

"No, it wouldn't," said Lady Lyonesse, her sense of humour coming to her rescue. "Your nonchalance is incredible, but your honesty makes me value your friendship. I should be sorry to lose the only person I ever met who did not pretend at all. I see that I cannot rely on your help in trying to get them back again."

"I should love to have Paul back, but there's only one way to do it."

"And that is?"

"To welcome him as Rhoda's husband when the law has taken its course."

PAUL'S WIFE

CHAPTER XXV

WHAT THEY DID AT ROME

RHODA had chosen Rome for their home because there were so many features about it to interest Paul, and because the English in Rome mind their own business more than they do in Florence. On that second evening in Turin, after they had confessed until quite late the beginnings of their mutual attraction, they spoke about where they should go in Rome. And then Rhoda directed the conversation to the delights of Rome, for she could see that Paul was beginning to look troubled. Nor was it unnatural, for Lord Lyonesse's arrival could not be delayed long after their own arrival in Rome, and whatever palliating or encouraging features there may be in the case, it is never easy to meet the father of the woman with whom you have eloped, especially where the woman is a pure and beautiful girl, with brilliant matrimonial prospects.

It would have been unlike Paul not to be willing to "face the music," as they say in pugilistic circles. He had faced it a hundred times in politics. But the situation was one repugnant alike to his dignity and to his feelings. Rhoda would have liked to spare him the ordeal altogether, but he would not hear of that. All that he would concede was that she should see her father first. But when they woke up next morning to another perfect winter day, Rhoda looked so fresh and lovely that Paul was conscious of having the best thing in life, whatever storms had to be passed-through.

They spent the morning at the Picture Gallery and among the wonders of the Egyptian Museum. Turin was swept and garnished by the monk who rebuilt it too much to have any interesting churches left in it. Then they lunched and took the train for the dull journey via Genoa to Rome. When they had crossed the uninspired

WHAT THEY DID AT ROME

plains of Piedmont and the uncitied mountains of Liguria to Genoa, the darkness mercifully fell, sparing them the irritating tunnels, diversified by peeps of paradise, which thread the Ligurian and Tuscan coasts. Dinner took up the first hour of the stretch between Genoa and Pisa, and very early they had their berths made up and retired to bed, so as to be up at daylight for the approach to Rome. The last shades of night veiled from them Corneto's long line of Lombard towers, and the plateaux pitted by the Etruscan tombs of the two great cities of the Tarquins, Tarquinii and Caere; the sun rose over the Campagna of Rome.

At first it revealed nothing but flat stretches of lazy, pearly sea, green hillsides, and here the loggia of a farm, there the prostrate skeleton of some building of ancient Rome. But suddenly the dome of St. Peter's rose like a hill of opal on the horizon, and soon the train was chasing round the walls of Rome, as if it was trying to find an opening. St. Peter's had no special thrill for Paul, but he was enchanted by the nobility of these walls, built by one of the later Cæsars. And when the train circled to the south and showed the great aqueducts, spreading in the grandest vertebræ of arches which the world can show, from the mountains of the Sabines to the Imperial City, his enthusiasm knew no bounds. His touches on Rhoda's shoulder to force her co-inspection were like the tap, tap of a telegraph instrument.

They had arranged to go to the new Hotel Lateran—the old Villa Wolkonsky—because they naturally could not go to the Grand Hotel, where the Lyonesses always stayed; there was less chance of Rhoda being recognized at a new hotel. She did not wish the hotel-keepers who knew her to discover her travelling with a man to whom she was not married, as his wife, however much she gloried in the relation. When they got there she was gratified to find that not only was it out of the beaten track, but occupied almost entirely by Americans, on account of some new heating system. The garden, of course, was delightful, and she was sitting in the garden when the German hotel-porter, with a profound bow, brought her a card:

PAUL'S WIFE

For Mrs. Wentworth.

LORD LYONESSE,
133, Park Lane, W.

Carbis Castle,
St. Ives.

saying that my lord was waiting for her in her private sitting-room. She noted that her father had written on the top left-hand corner of his card: "For Mrs. Wentworth." It showed that he did not mean to betray her to the hotel-keeper, at any rate. She said to the porter in Italian, "Tell Signor Wentworth that my father is here, and that I will send for him presently to join us."

He bowed more profoundly. So the beautiful English lady was the daughter of a My-Lord? He had told himself that he was sure she was a *somebody* when she arrived. *Somebody* had a particular meaning for him.

"You needn't come up to my room," she said. "I know the way." She certainly did not desire a witness for what must be a delicate meeting, though she was so sure of her own position. She went into the room, looking so well and handsome and happy, that one load was taken off Lord Lyonesse's mind. There was no question of her being engulfed in a tragedy which threatened to overwhelm a young life full of promise. She was merely a truant, and after all that had passed, had no fear of him. She flew to him the moment she entered the room, and he did not refuse her. But he said, when they sat down, "Well, Rhoda, we did not deserve this of you!"

"I think you did, father. I only thought of Paul's companionship. I did not want anything more. And you would not let me have that. The harder I fought for it, the closer you confined me. I did not sulk; I was an affectionate daughter to you all the time. All that I did was to have the communication with Paul which was more than meat and drink to me. It was only when you made arrangements to take me off in a yacht to the other side of the world, so that I might never see him again, or at all events not for many months, that I ran away."

"Well, I suppose there is something in that." Lord

WHAT THEY DID AT ROME

Lyonesse was a just man. "But you must come back with me now, Rhoda. And if you give me your word that your friendship for Paul Wentworth shall be purely platonic, I promise you that you shall not be deprived of it."

"It is too late now, father. I might come back with you if you arranged everything as I wished. But our friendship can no longer be platonic, for ever since we got to Turin I have been a wife to Paul."

Lord Lyonesse did not dispute the application of the word. He recognized its meaning, and bowed his head in shame. "Then he is a villain!" he said, in low, furious tones.

"But he is not a villain, for he begged me to let our companionship remain platonic—even if Vivien Wentworth claimed a divorce."

"Will you swear this, Rhoda?"

"I will."

"Then how did it happen?"

"I made him."

"You made him? Rhoda, this is the crowning shame!"

"You are mistaken, dear," she said calmly, but with the affection of a mother trying to persuade a fallen child that he has not been hurt. "It would not have been fair to Paul, for no one would have believed it, and yet it might have been asking a man to refrain beyond natural endurance."

"I think you might have tried the experiment, as he was gentleman enough to be willing."

"That was not the chief reason, father."

"What was it, then?"

"I knew that you would follow me, and I knew that you would urge me to go back with you, and if I had been free it would have been so almost impossible to refuse you. But when I had once been a wife to Paul, I knew that you could not ask me to leave him. And I never will leave him while we are both alive."

"You wished to make it irrevocable?"

"I wished to make it irrevocable," she said, raising her eyes and looking him straight in the face.

PAUL'S WIFE

"Oh, Rhoda! Have you passed by so many brilliant matches only to come to this?"

"Only to come to this! What man has ever wanted to marry me who could be compared to Paul Wentworth?"

"Lord Oxford."

"Lord Oxford?"

"Well, who could be more eligible than Lord Oxford?—the head of the historic Veres? He's a good-looking chap, and as nice as he looks, not devoid of brains, and the finest polo-player in the whole peerage. He keeps goal for the Old Etonians."

"Lord Oxford's a darling, and he isn't a fool, but, father dear, he wouldn't keep me interested. I should only be the mother of his children—and they'd be darlings, too. But think of Lord Oxford compared to Paul!"

"But, hang it all," he said, "Paul's married!"

"I don't care if he's fifty times married, and will never be set free. Paul Wentworth is a man among men—the leader who is going to make the Empire ring true, as he made Australia ring true."

"But he didn't last in Australia. He's a cipher to-day."

"Nothing can last in politics, father, until the Liberals of the world recognize that their duty is to liberalize the Conservatives, not to be the dupes of the Socialists."

Lord Lyonesse did not reply. This was a truth which had gradually been forcing itself on him for months past. Besides, he was discussing Paul, not politics. "Then I am to understand, Rhoda, that Paul Wentworth is virtually your husband, and that you mean to go on living with him?"

"Yes, father dear."

"Putting the best complexion on it, Rhoda, it's a terrible business for us. We cannot expect our friends to understand the lofty plane on which you place it—from which I do not say that I disagree," he hastened to add; Rhoda looked at him gratefully. "But the fact remains that our only child, the heiress of our ancient name . . ."

"Not to mention the title!" said Rhoda rebelliously.

WHAT THEY DID AT ROME

Her father took no notice of the interruption, but continued: "... has chosen to ally herself with a man in a union which is recognized neither by the Church, nor by the Law, nor by Society."

"I am very sorry, father, but it is my life, not anybody else's, that I am disposing of."

He looked at her narrowly. "In a way, I don't deny that you are right, Rhoda. But if you do not owe a duty to the parents who brought you into the world for their gratification, you owe a duty to the ancient name which you have the honour to bear." He saw the reproachful look on Rhoda's face, and altered the phrase. "Which you had the honour to have inherited."

"What greater honour could I have paid my ancestors than to bring a man like Paul Wentworth, the greatest man in the Empire, into our family?"

"If he had been your husband, none, dear."

"But he is my husband in everything else but law, already, and he will be my husband in law, too, when his other wife takes proceedings to divorce him."

"But will she take proceedings?"

Rhoda's face dropped. "I confess that I don't know," she said. "She has always been very good to us in our friendship. But no man could ever prophesy what Vivien Wentworth would do, and she has been no wife to Paul, or you and I would not be here now."

"I was coming to that. What of the wife you have wronged?"

"She was no wife to him. She got tired of her marriage as quickly as a spoilt child with many toys tires of a new doll. And though she went on living under his roof, and though they may have continued to be man and wife in the Prayer Book sense of the word, in every other sense she has led an entirely separate existence, not displaying the slightest interest in any of his concerns, occupied altogether with her own selfish and useless amusements. Freddy has told me what a barren life she has been leading and how barren she has kept poor Paul's home life."

"Has he told you?"

"Yes."

"Why did he tell you?"

PAUL'S WIFE

“Because I could not help asking him.”

“Why did you ask him?”

“Because I wished to know if I was breaking the Eighth Commandment. Have you anything more to ask me, father?”

“Not until I have seen . . .”

“Paul?” He nodded. “He wishes to see you, too. But what is there to be gained by it? Either of you may say things which years cannot heal. Is it wise for you to see him, father?”

“Rhoda, I did not come all this way, to return to London without seeing the man who has done me such an injury.”

“And is that what you are going to say to him?”

“I am going to see him. Man to man, we have an account to settle,” he answered resolutely.

“You are going to quarrel with him. Oh, father, I have tried to prevent this. I will answer any questions. I will consider any promises, if you don’t quarrel with Paul.”

“I have no wish to quarrel with him. But there are certain things which must be said.”

“Give me your hand, father.”

Lord Lyonesse gave it so frankly that she felt a little comforted. But with what misgivings she went to summon Paul! When she brought him, her father said, “Leave us, please, Rhoda.” She hesitated, until she saw him hold out his hand to Paul. When she had gone, after an awkward pause, her father began: “This is a bad business!”

“I think so, too,” said Paul, “in a way, but it is the best business I ever did in my life.”

“Do you think so?” said Rhoda’s father, softening with parental pride.

“There’s no woman like Rhoda in all the world!” cried Paul enthusiastically. “And she has given me her society, her companionship until she dies!”

“I wish it was only that!” groaned Lord Lyonesse.

“I was perfectly willing that it should be. We should never have run away unless you had forced our hands by that yacht-tour.”

WHAT THEY DID AT ROME

"And you offered my daughter to leave her single until you were free to marry her, I think?"

"Did she tell you so?"

"She did."

"That was my idea. It seemed too great a sacrifice for her to make. I did not feel worthy of it. Though it has been the most beautiful thing in my life, I still feel that it was too much to give me."

"But she did give it to you, and it cannot be revoked!"

"Thank God that it cannot!"

"You can hardly expect me to echo those words."

"Not yet," said Paul bravely.

Lord Lyonesse paused. Logically, as a Liberal—and he was still a Liberal at heart, though his Party had been found so wanting in the care of the National defences that he could no longer follow them—it was his inclination to untie every knot with which the Constitution is secured. If the Socialist tail had forced the Liberal Party to bring forward a measure making marriage—or, as they would call it, the hire of a wife—terminable, like the hire of a cook, by either party giving a certain notice, Lord Lyonesse would have felt bound to support the measure. If such a measure were passed, a case like the present could not arise, because Paul, having legally terminated the earlier contract, would be fully at liberty to present himself as a husband for Rhoda. Lord Lyonesse had before him a steady love-match, which had begun in a flagitious breach of conventionalities. He was not sure if he would have condemned it if it had been a case which did not concern himself, brought before his notice in the confiding columns of an evening paper. And there was the comforting feature in the case that Paul could not be dreaded as an adventurer, attracted solely by Rhoda's inheritance, for though he lived so quietly, his wealth was a matter of common knowledge, and arising as it did from private securities in which the individual pays the income-tax direct, its amount could easily be verified from Government sources, by a man who was so close a personal friend of the Chancellor of the Exchequer as Lord Lyonesse was. Public opinion was the feature

PAUL'S WIFE

of the case which he dreaded ; it was one of the few matters in which he cared for Public—meaning Social—opinion. Things looked so bad for Paul to everyone except his sister and the woman with whom he had eloped and the worthless Freddy. Here was a man who had a wife still in the prime of her uncommon beauty, who suddenly, for no reason at all, left her to corrupt and run-away-with a girl who had kept herself free from the mildest flirtation—the daughter of a friend, to whose kindness he owed much, a girl with the highest prospects.

At this juncture Lord Lyonesse showed himself a great man. He disregarded the appearances of the case. He came straight to the point of his daughter's happiness. He asked himself whether he ought to have given his consent if Paul Wentworth had been an unmarried man, and had come to him to ask for his daughter's hand. Was the marriage likely to give her complete and permanent happiness ? Was this the right man ? He was convinced that he was. He asked himself why should he wreck his daughter's happiness because Paul had to be divorced before he could marry her, following the same procedure in essence as the manager of his smelting works would have to follow if he were offered and accepted the position of manager of the smelting works of Lord Swansea or Lord Wimborne. He would not, if he could, prevent his manager doing this. Why should he object to his daughter's receiving her happiness by a similar change in Paul's service ? The point for him to decide, disregarding Social opinion, was, *convinced or not convinced*. And he knew that he was convinced.

Rhoda, while her father was talking over these matters of life and death interest to Paul, sat in her bedroom, awaiting the result without anxiety. Paul, she knew, would never leave her. She would never leave him, and her father had promised not to quarrel with him. The unravelling of the skein was, therefore, a matter of patience, and she felt that she could afford infinite patience for Paul's sake.

For Paul, when Lord Lyonesse asked to see his daughter alone once more, it was different. Of course he meant to make a final appeal to her to return to England with

WHAT THEY DID AT ROME

him ! And the temptation was overwhelming. Rhoda would get her father and mother back instead of losing them, and Society would in time forgive youth, beauty and wealth. On the other side, what was there ? Life with him in exile ; life, at her age, with no prizes but the love of a man of fifty and the distractions of travel. But the loss to him if she went back ! It would be too terrible to have enjoyed, though he had not enjoyed one full week of it yet, the awakening to the passion of love in a woman like Rhoda, a woman of such physical and intellectual perfections, in the very pride of her youth, with the ardour of romance, the glamour of sacrifice thrown in, only to lose her ! It was a privilege that could come to but one man in a million, and it had come to him after twenty years of married life as sterile as a desert, in which he had not once raised his eyes to note the pleasant gardens, watered by the River of Life, in which other husbands and wives reposed, like the Egyptians on the banks of the fostering Nile. It had come in a dream, and it might go in a dream, with the gems turned back to dead leaves, like the treasures in the legend of the Alhambra. Paul, who had known for such a brief respite the one-and-all-sufficient happiness which man and woman knew before their fall ; Paul, who had but now eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, felt that the gates of Eden were about to be closed on him, guarded night and day by the Angel of Regret, holding a fiery sword, whose flame would not suffer memory to sleep. He could feel anxiety gnawing under his heart, while Rhoda, weak, being a woman, bore the assault of all her father's forces—Horse, Foot, and Artillery. How could the result be in doubt, with the springs of natural affection supporting her father ? And their parting—that, too, might be abrupt. He could picture her father saying : “ My daughter . . . ”—no, he might call her “ Rhoda,” now that he had won—“ Rhoda has decided to go with me. She thinks she had better not see you again ; it would only be painful to both of you. We shall leave Rome to-night, and I must trust to your honour never to attempt to see my daughter again.”

What father and daughter said in their talk did not

PAUL'S WIFE

transpire. But when it was over, Rhoda came and fetched Paul, and walked him into her father with her arm round him, and Lord Lyonesse said, "Paul, I am going to give you Rhoda, as I had hoped to give her away at the altar. I pray that you may always cherish the sacred trust of her happiness."

"I will, indeed I will!"

"Paul, I am going to stay with you here for a few days. I know that I shall be called a dotard, a person without dignity or decency, but I have a double purpose to serve. I wish to assure myself of Rhoda's happiness, which is my reason for accepting this extraordinary situation, and I wish to show the courage of my convictions. If I condone your theft of my daughter, it is for a sufficient reason. And if I lend my countenance, it is best for me to lend it in the face of all the world, to show that I am your friend, that I accept the new order of things in which human happiness is placed before Social conventions. Having said this much to reassure you, I must warn you that Rhoda's mother's attitude is one of uncompromising hostility."

Paul could well believe this. He had heard Lady Lyonesse deliver herself of diatribes upon Rhoda's cheapening herself at the political receptions, and of anathemas on anyone who was led by observing Rhoda's attitude at the receptions to misunderstand the intentions she had formed for Rhoda Socially. If Lady Lyonesse had never addressed any of her insulting warnings to him personally, it was because he was married, and therefore out of the running, and because, until the serious condition of things began which led to the rupture, his behaviour was very detached.

"I will not be any tie to you," said Lord Lyonesse. "Your table only holds two, and I don't want to disturb you. A seat at the long table will suit me quite well, and in a day or two I shall slip back to England, without letting you know." He was not speaking *sine proposito*. If he did not sit with them, but opposite them, and joining in the general conversation, he could watch them to see how far he was justified in giving them his countenance, much better than if he sat beside them.

WHAT THEY DID AT ROME

But he always left the room with them after lunch and after dinner, to take coffee and cigarettes together in the winter-garden. In the days he spent in Rome with them, Lord Lyonesse felt reason to be satisfied with Paul's attitude. There was never the slightest atmosphere of elopement about his relations with Rhoda. They were more like a childless couple who have been married for years, and have learned to regard marriage as the most delightful of all companionships. They were such complete friends, and Paul took a child's pleasure in learning the A B C of Art-worship in Italy. Lord Lyonesse was all for their taking a house in Rome. Paul had given him a minute statement of his financial position, which showed that expense need not stand in the way of their plans.

"You had better take a house," he said, "because it will save you many unpleasantnesses when your story becomes known and you are recognized. At present your names mean nothing to anybody in the hotel, but that state of things can't last. Soon people will begin to discuss whether they can know you or not. You would not want to know such people, but you want to be in a place where you are independent of their opinion. I should take a villa outside Rome. A few miles is only a matter of a few minutes in a car, and you will have your garden. Those of Rhoda's friends who want to see something of her will hunt her up, and the rest will have an excuse for not coming."

"Yes, let's take a villa, Paul. I think it's an excellent idea!"

"Besides," continued her father, "hotels are apt to pall after a bit, and you'll have to be here, or, at any rate, somewhere out of England for a good many months, because you can't come back until Paul has been divorced and you are married, and I think it would be wiser not to come for some time after that. I can come and join you abroad from time to time."

"I feel as if I never wanted to go back to England," said Paul, in whose breast the wrecking of the Universal Service League still rankled.

"Never is a long time," said Lord Lyonesse. "But,

PAUL'S WIFE

at all events, you will want a house, and I should rather like to see the house you choose before I return home."

"You had better help Rhoda choose it, if you will—I shall know if I am satisfied with the aspect and accommodation, but as far as æsthetic and scenic qualities are concerned, my opinion is worth nothing," said the ex-Prime Minister of Australia.

"You must come, too, Paul," said Rhoda, rather disappointed. "I shouldn't like choosing without you."

"Certainly, dear, but you two do the talking."

Lord Lyonesse would not go to his own bankers, for obvious reasons, and, indeed, he considered Sebasti and Reali, who did not know him by sight, preferable for taking a house. They at once suggested the Villa Celimontana, as being within the city limits and as having the finest garden and views of any villa within a reasonable distance. They mentioned the rent, which was considerable, but not serious for a man of Paul's means, and on learning his name, professed themselves anxious to be of any service to him, and ready to waive the matter of a reference. But he preferred to open an account, of sufficient magnitude to be in itself a reference, in their bank, and they promised to send an order for the inspection of the villa in an hour or two.

"I have never been in the house," said Lord Lyonesse, "but judging from the glimpses one gets in seeing over the garden, I should think it would be all right. You couldn't have a more ideal position, and would hardly find a better garden 'to-let.'"

The order arrived after lunch, in time for them to drive out and see the villa. It came a couple of hours later than the bankers had hoped, but one gets accustomed to that in Italy. Paul was more satisfied than Rhoda with the house, being guided by more material considerations. All of them were quite carried away by the views of the Seven Hills and the monuments of ancient Roma in the low rays of the winter sunset. They decided to take the house, subject to certain ordinary conditions.

And so Paul and Rhoda entered on their first home. Lord Lyonesse waited to see them installed, and spent

WHAT THEY SAID AT HOME

a few days with them. This he did partly to show his attitude, and partly so that Rhoda might settle with him which of her household gods should be sent to her by the courier who was to bring her clothes and jewellery from Lyonesse House to the Villa Celimontana.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHAT THEY SAID AT HOME

LADY LYONESSE had refused to say much about the subject before her husband went to Rome, but what little she did say was bitterer than gall. Her bitterness was a cloak for savage regret. She held herself to blame, and in more ways than one. She had done too little and too much. She had let Rhoda's infatuation grow up under her very eyes, while if the letter which Rhoda wrote to her parents in the train between London and Dover told the truth—and it had the ring of truth—she had used constraint when it was too late to do anything but harm, and converted the worship for a great man and a yearning to be constantly in his presence into reasons for a vulgar elopement. Rhoda, if she had taken her in hand in time, might never have made a personal friend of Paul—so Lady Lyonesse believed. But if Rhoda was desperately anxious for his company, he might have been given a footing in the house as a sort of uncle. She did not tell her husband this, though she cursed herself for her blindness at the beginning.

Few people dared to open the subject with the terrible old lady. She gathered her knowledge of what people were saying from the newspapers. The manager of the Press-Cutting Agency, which served Lord Lyonesse with the clippings from the newspapers about his sayings and doings, wrote a letter which moved Lady Lyonesse to laughter, in the midst of her troubles, inquiring, with absurd circumlocution and apologies, if he would care to have cuttings relative to his "recent bereavement." Lord Lyonesse handed it to his wife, who ordered every scrap connected with the subject to be sent to her, no

PAUL'S WIFE

matter how distressing its gossip or its sarcasms might be. She was curious to know what people were saying, and the newspapers could not see her face while she was reading their comments.

The Press, as might have been expected, behaved uncommonly well. Certain of the Radical dailies could not resist a dig at their arch-enemy, Paul, and threw stones at the fallen Rhoda, who had committed the unpardonable crime of following him into the opposite camp. But they only sneered at her as a feather-brained young lady, who might commit any foolishness without surprising them. It was foolishness which they laid at her door, not sin. Some of the penny Society weeklies which were in Radical hands behaved much worse. They invented previous scandals in Rhoda's life, to account for the present disgraceful incident, and assaulted her and Paul—and Lady Lyonesse—with vituperation and innuendo. But the general attitude of the Press was to express sympathy with the relations of both parties, and to refer to the incident as a highly regrettable one, about which the least said the better. This did not, however, prevent the halfpenny papers from indulging their passion for headlines :

“ FLIGHT OF A PEER'S DAUGHTER
WITH A MEMBER OF HIS MAJESTY'S
PRIVY COUNCIL.”

“ ELOPEMENT OF THE HON. RHODA
ST. IVES ! ”

and *The Daily Rad* went so far as :

“ ABDUCTION OF A LIBERAL STATESMAN'S
DAUGHTER BY A RENEGADE FROM
THE PARTY.”

But as the Press of one side wished to hush the matter up for Paul's and Rhoda's sakes, and the Press of the other side for Lord Lyonesse's sake, the matter was hushed up in the decent papers, as far as the public desire for news on the subject would allow it to be.

The effect of the blow on Paul's own household was

WHAT THEY SAID AT HOME

more complex. Vicky, to whom Paul's parting words came back with excruciating emphasis, was prostrated by her idol's extinguishing himself in politics, and felt the disgrace horribly. To her it seemed that Paul had stolen the daughter of their best friends. Freddy, who was unremitting in his kindness, and showed a charming taste in trying to heal her wounds, assured her that some explanation would be forthcoming, which would place a better complexion on events. But she refused to be comforted. She could not understand Vivien's attitude. The first thing Vivien said when she heard of it was, "Poor old Paul! They'll say such hard things about him, and he's such a good sort. I'm sure he isn't to blame—he never looked at a woman, unless she made him by main force! I married him; he didn't marry me. He hasn't got that to blame himself for."

"Oh, Vivien, how can you talk so hatefully?" sobbed Vicky.

"I don't see where the *hatefully* comes in. I'm right down sorry for him. And I hope it turns out well!"

"Vivien!" Vicky stamped her foot.

"Well, I hope it does. He must have been very tired of me."

"Woman, don't you feel the disgrace?"

"I can't say that I do. If the law had had the sense to let people who never ought to have married each other have the right of annulling the sacred contract, I'd have insisted on his taking his freedom long ago."

Vicky knew that Vivien was talking common sense which could not be contradicted, but it did not prevent a fresh outburst. This gave Vivien a perverse pleasure. She was nothing if not perverse, and she loved to work another person up into a temper almost as well as getting into a temper herself. She insinuated that Vicky had lost her temper by saying, "I hope his Rhoda hasn't such a beast of a temper as I have. He deserves better luck this time."

"Have you no decency, woman?" screamed Vicky.

"Truth is more important than decency," answered Vivien sententiously, though she had no objection to telling a decent lie if it suited her.

PAUL'S WIFE

"You of all people ought to feel outraged!"

"I? Why should I? I've never done anything for him, except pay the bills while he was poor."

"You're his wife!"

"His wife? A fine sort of wife I've been! I never cared what he did, so long as he didn't bother me."

Freddy got up and left the room.

"You see, even Freddy can't stand the disgraceful way in which you are talking, and he's none too squeamish."

"Freddy!" Vivien roared with laughter.

"Please don't, Vivien!" entreated Vicky, bursting into tears.

Vivien was genuinely fond of Vicky, whose tears generally had an instant effect on her, but this time she persisted. "I won't have anything said against Paul. He's a good sort, if ever there was one. And I like her; she deserves him much more than I do."

"Oh, please, Vivien!"

"I tell you she does, and if they can be happy, they have my goodwill."

"I never heard such a disgraceful thing from a married woman!"

"I am disgraceful, I suppose. But I don't see why I should pretend to be angry with Paul when I am only sorry for him."

"But you must be angry."

"Why? For his trying to mend his life? He'll only have one."

"Well, I'm Paul's sister, but I hate hearing you talk like this."

"Aren't you sorry for him?"

"Of course I am. And if he ever needs me, he'll find me true. But I can never forget how wicked he's been about this."

"Oh, chuck it, Vicky! Paul isn't as bad as half the people you meet."

"Do you mean to say that you won't take any steps to divorce him?"

"Of course I shall, in double quick time. The least I can do is to give him the chance of marrying her."

WHAT THEY SAID AT HOME

"Oh, Vivien," said Vicky, half-smiling in spite of her tears, "you are incorrigible!"

"I mean to be. What is the good of blinking at the fact that Paul and I have led a cat and dog life for years past? And now that he's taken his courage in both hands at last—why should I be the one to throw stones at him?"

"Well, I think it's very high-minded of you."

"No, I was never high-minded. But once in a way I'm a 'sport.' And this is an occasion on which I mean to be a 'sport.' Your good health, Paul and Rhoda!"

"I can't follow you, Vivien. But I'm glad that there's somebody who believes in Paul."

* * * * *

When Vivien went to see Sir George Salmon, and announced that she had come to consult him about getting a divorce, he was a good deal interested. He could not but acknowledge her striking beauty, and she was in the best of humours with herself, for she meant to act like a sportsman, and also to take the credit for it. When he heard that it was the famous St. Ives case, his interest deepened decidedly, but he did not feel sure if he wanted to be employed against his old friends, Lord Lyonesse and Rhoda. For he could not but expect that the proceedings from this beautiful young woman, who had temper and recklessness written so large over her face, would be unusually rancorous.

"I must tell you," he said, "that the Honourable Rhoda St. Ives, who is co-respondent in the case, and her father are among my most esteemed friends, and I think I should like to know the line you are going to take up before I accept the case."

The first part of her reply brought a genial smile to his face, but as she proceeded, his brows knitted. "What you say," he explained, "is most generous and honourable to yourself, but its effect would be to take away the power of the judge to grant a divorce. So your husband could not afford to accept your offer. That the law should take such a view shows a rotten state of affairs, but it is

PAUL'S WIFE

the law. What you say shows that you want to help your husband."

"I do, indeed, and if I cannot be allowed to do this, I want the proceedings to be as little contentious as possible. My sole desire is to have the marriage dissolved with as little fuss and bad blood as can be managed. I bear my husband no grudge, and you can arrange for me to take whatever steps you think best."

"That will be all right, Mrs. Wentworth," said Sir George, much relieved. "We shall have to get you to put us in possession of certain facts, sufficient to prove what is necessary, and if the case is undefended, as I suppose it will be, and heard without a jury, I think the whole thing will be put through very quietly. The judge will, of course, wish to create as little scandal as possible where such eminent persons are concerned. I must congratulate you on the very proper spirit you are showing in the matter. We will brief Mr. Valerian, K.C.; there is no one like him for showing good feeling. And may I give you one word of advice, Mrs. Wentworth?"

"I came to you for advice, Sir George."

"When you appear before the judge, don't dress for the part."

"Not even half mourning?" she said ironically.

"Black, if you like, but no widow's weeds, and not too large a hat."

CHAPTER XXVII

VICKY WENTWORTH'S ENGAGEMENT

VICKY WENTWORTH had her love-troubles, too. On the face of things, she was a fortunate woman, for she and Freddy Fenwick were equally devoted to each other. Whenever Vivien had not needed him, he had been a *preux chevalier*, and since Paul's elopement he had been a treasure, loyal to Paul and fertile in expedients to save the Wentworth women from embarrassments. But her friends saw nothing in front of her but disaster if she persisted in marrying him. For his income from

VICKY WENTWORTH'S ENGAGEMENT

Paul, which was his sole income, had always been temporary, and now seemed to be doomed. And Paul's allowance of five hundred a year to Vicky—a pittance to the extravagant Freddy—though it made her a very well-off young woman, would be all she had to rely on. Further, they looked upon Freddy as a butterfly and a ne'er-do-well and a dissipated person, who could not possibly keep a decent woman happy.

The most insistive—and he had the most right to be—was David Shand, the wealthy Australian merchant who had been a suitor for her hand ever since she could remember. Vicky often thought that she ought to marry him. He was good and good-natured, pleasant-looking and worthy. The objection to him was that he was so uninteresting, that after the public life which Vicky had led as a Prime Minister's sister, she could not contemplate him as her husband. There would be trouble, of course, with Vivien, who regarded Freddy as her property, specially hired by the erring Paul to escort her, to carry out her behests and to entertain her generally. He had to spend a great deal of his time in entertaining her. Vivien was not backward in demanding his services. It would not suit her book at all, Vicky thought, to lose her tame cavalier. But she did not intend to let that count. She had given up quite enough for Vivien in her life.

To bring matters to a crisis, she persuaded him to accept a position which Lord Lyonesse offered him, to take charge of his agency in a Yorkshire manufacturing town, from whose rents he drew a large income. It was a nice old town from the tourist's point of view, but from Freddy's it was anathema—a place in which he would not get one of his favourite amusements, except a little shooting and fishing from neighbours. There was a decent, rent-free house built into the ruins of the castle, for the agent's residence, and a fair income from the commission on the rents. This, united to her five hundred a year, would give them enough to live on, if Freddy was removed from the extravagances of London. Freddy loved her sufficiently to consent to go there, though his only solace was that it was near Doncaster. The sequel

PAUL'S WIFE

was that, to David Shand's despair, they became formally engaged.

When Freddy handed, to Vicky, on behalf of her brother, his resignation of his secretaryship to Paul Wentworth, Vivien thought that things were getting serious, and determined to put her spoke into Vicky's wheel. The opportunity did not arise immediately. Freddy had come to the flat to answer the letters, and attend Vicky in giving orders for the household week after week; had dusted many chairs in the Park with beautiful pocket-handkerchiefs for her, and taken her to picture-galleries and Christie sales, returning to lunch to be at Vivien's disposal for the afternoon—which meant, as the season advanced, racing, if there was any, or polo at Hurlingham or Ranelagh. And if she wanted to be taken anywhere in the evening, he took her. She and Vicky were going to very few parties just now, except where people knew of the elopement and pressed them in spite of it, which Lady Lyonesse, for one, made a special point of doing. She entertained as if nothing had happened, ignoring the existence of Rhoda. Vicky, indeed, though she was engaged to Lady Lyonesse's nephew and her fiancé had, since the elopement, received an important appointment from Lord Lyonesse, felt shamefaced about accepting, but Vivien was *insouciant* as ever. No one could suspect her pride of having received a deadly wound. It was not long before hostesses, as well as Vicky, were aware that the rich and beautiful Mrs. Wentworth refused invitations not because she was ashamed, but because she was bored, which brought a fresh shower of them. She accepted them out of perversity, and went with Freddy alone, because Vicky felt unable to face them.

Upon one point, however, Freddy was firm—he would not come into the flat when he took her home, however much Vivien urged him. And this increased her inclination to mischief, which was seldom far below the surface. She owed Vicky one for making Freddy engage himself to her.

VIVIEN DECLARES

CHAPTER XXVIII

VIVIEN DECLARES

VIVIEN was a creature of impulses which she made no attempt to restrain. As they swept over her she played with the lives of Vicky and Freddy as a cat lets a mouse go to catch it again. She did not know for two days together what she desired, and cruelty, tempered by occasional remorse, was a passion with her. Deep down in her savage little heart she hated Freddy for preferring Vicky to her, and resented Vicky's having imposed sanity on her for so many years. Hardly less deep in her heart she loved Vicky, whose cool common sense had been the harbour of refuge for her storm-tossed life in so many tempests.

Now she was going to have a master scene, in which she would humiliate Vicky to the dust, and yet repay her benefactor and save her from the destruction to which she was consigned. She had sent for Vicky, as she often did send for her when she was, to use Freddy's concise definition, *raising hell in the house*. Vicky loathed and dreaded these encounters, but she generally came out victor in the end, and she went through them for Paul's sake. A sickening presentiment almost overcame her. She did not yield to it. She had felt it before, and a Divinity had shaped her ends. So she knocked at the door of the sitting-room next to her sister-in-law's bedroom, in which Vivien spent so much of her time doing nothing.

The spirit of mischief was obvious everywhere. Nearly every costly piece of furniture had been robbed of its value by some ignorant or idiotic alteration to suit the whim of the moment. On the largest table, pulled to pieces, lay two or three of Vivien's most expensive hats, out of which Vivien imagined that she was going to form fresh combinations; a half-open drawer showed itself full of costly trifles crushed in anyhow. Vivien was in her petticoats. Vicky felt that the elaborate afternoon gown which she had taken off was doubtless an op-

PAUL'S WIFE

pressive one to wear, but that this was hardly a sufficient reason for tearing it off and flinging it in a heap on a sofa. Vivien looked perfectly lovely. Her chemise was very *décolletée*, and she spent a small fortune on her underclothes. She was not in the passion which experience had taught Vicky to expect. She looked smiling and childish, as if she was on her best behaviour, but she unmasked her batteries at once.

"Vicky dear, I sent for you to tell you that it is impossible for you to marry Freddy."

"I wish you'd mind your own business, Vivy. I've heard it all before so many times from David Shand and your guardian and Lord Lyonesse."

"Then they know more than I gave them credit for!" said Vivien grimly.

"I don't understand you."

"I didn't think you would!"

"What are you driving at, Vivien?" cried Vicky impatiently.

Vivien was in no haste to come to the point. One moment she wanted to spare Vicky, the next she gloated over torturing her. She loved kissing Vicky's soft cheeks. She came over and kissed her now, and as she kissed her the desire to spare her grew strong. But Vicky pushed her away.

"Oh, stop these Judas kisses if you have anything horrible to say!"

"It's far better that I shouldn't say anything, and that you should take my word for it. I tell you on oath, the most solemn oath you choose to impose on me, that there is an insuperable bar to your marriage with Freddy. It has nothing whatever to do with the reasons which have been dinned into your ears. They are true enough, but I have never suggested them as obstacles. I should be the first to disregard them myself, if I wished to marry a man. Why won't you take my word for it?"

"Why won't I take your word for it? Why in the face of heaven should I let you destroy my happiness without deigning a word of explanation? I mean to marry Freddy whatever people may say."

"I don't think you will."

VIVIEN DECLARES

"I shall."

"Look at me!" she said, smiling like an angel.

Vicky looked at her sullenly.

"Do you see any change in me?"

"Vivien, I could almost damn you! First you tell me that there is some horrible new reason why I am not to marry the man I love, and then in the middle of it all, you ask me how you are looking. I have often felt inclined to wring your neck like a parrot's when you have exasperated me with your parrot's cry, in season and out of season, 'How am I looking?' But I never felt so inclined to wring it as I do at this present moment."

"Well, how am I looking? Do give me your opinion, because everything depends on it."

"I suppose you are going to tell me that Freddy cares more for you than he cares for me!"

"Do I look like it?"

Vicky scrutinized her, to try and find a clue. Certainly Vivien did look unusually lovely. Her face was really softer; the lean leopard touch about it was disappearing. There was a new look in the eyes.

"You're in love with Freddy yourself, that is your new obstacle!" cried Vicky wrathfully. "I tell you that that's no obstacle at all! You may be in love with Freddy, but Freddy's in love with me—honestly, over head and ears, beyond recall by your lures, Paul's wife."

"Paul's wife!" echoed Vivien sweetly. "A nice husband I've got, living with another woman as his wife in rapture at Rome!"

"Well, if he is, you've made him do it with the life you've led him."

"I know. I couldn't help it. We were born different. Paul was a darling to me. But I couldn't stand him. He bored me. I should have liked him for a father, and broken his heart by my disobedience. I love Paul. He's a man, but he's a poor sort of husband."

"Oh, stop your senseless rattle, Vivien, and tell me what you mean!"

Vivien was not to be ruffled. She was enjoying the excitement too much. "If I can prove that Freddy loves me more than you, will you give him up?"

PAUL'S WIFE

Vicky felt as if she had been shot, but her pride came to her rescue. "If Freddy has been false to me," she declared, "I'll renounce him from this minute."

"Then see for yourself!" said Vivien, placing herself in profile between Vicky and the light. Vicky scrutinized her again from head to foot, and then, it came to her in a flash why Vivien had thrown off her dress, for standing only in her underclothes, profiled against the light, Vivien betrayed her approaching maternity. "It's Freddy's," she said. "And if you knew how I had longed for it, you'd forgive me. Things might have been different if I had borne Paul a child."

But Vicky heard nothing after the fatal words "It's Freddy's." Instinct convinced her that Vivien was telling the truth, and she was stunned. Mechanically she left the room and made her way to Paul's study, the room where Freddy and she had worked together and grown to love each other. As her reasoning powers came back to her, her common-sense, broad-minded view of life told her that it did not prove that Freddy had been false to her. For it was only during the past three or four months that the great affection had sprung up between them, and there was nothing yet to prove that his thoughts had once strayed from her since their courtship began. Certainly she had not one day's negligence to reproach him with.

CHAPTER XXIX

A CONSERVATIVE PARTY

VICKY had written the day before to tell Freddy that she would be at the St. Barbes' garden-party. The St. Barbes had a charming garden, which had once been an apple orchard, and now was a lawn shaded by old apple trees which had a fair show of apple blossom in the spring, though they were not good performers with fruit. It was crossed by mossy flagged paths, leading to old Italian stone seats and fountains. Here in June and July they gave garden-parties, which were among the principal gatherings of the Conservative Party.

A CONSERVATIVE PARTY

As Paul and Rhoda had been so much at the St. Barbes' in the period before their elopement, the St. Barbes had been pressing in their invitations to Vivien and Vicky. No one knew the meaning of *noblesse oblige* better than John St. Barbe. Vicky knew that Freddy would be invited, because he was a connection of Mrs. St. Barbe's. Freddy was looking forward especially to the occasion, because he hoped to get Vicky to fix the day soon, and wished to introduce her as his future wife to a number of important people. Vicky had told him at Ascot that she liked him better in his pale grey racing suit and grey top hat than in anything else, so he had put them on, and was wearing a bud of her favourite rose in his button-hole. The Blue Hungarian Band had just been playing "The Count of Luxemburg" waltz until his blood tingled, and he was in a simmer of pleasurable excitement as he waited for the beloved to appear.

Suddenly he saw Vicky coming down one of the stone alleys towards him, dressed not in the delicate and pale-coloured summery fabrics which became her best, and which she was so fond of wearing, but in black from head to foot, as if she were in mourning, an impression that was heightened by the sadness of her face and the traces of weeping. He hurried to meet her. There was heart-yearning in the way she gave her hand, and tears were standing in her eyes.

"Why, Vic," he cried, "what is the matter?"

"I can't tell you now, dear, but I've got to talk it out with you, so come in after dinner to-night."

It came as a blow to him that she did not with her usual frank hospitality ask him in to dinner if she wanted to talk to him afterwards. But he dismissed the thought as unworthy; she had something very particular to talk about—that was plain—and it might not be easy to get rid of Vivien quickly if he was dining there, while if the man she was engaged-to came to call on Vicky by appointment, Vivien naturally would not come in until they rang for the farewell whiskey and soda.

"Freddy," said Vicky, after a pause, as they paced up the path side by side, "promise me not to allude

PAUL'S WIFE

to this again until we meet to-night, will you, dear? I don't want to spoil this afternoon."

"Why, of course!" It needed no promise for Freddy to put off an evil day.

They strolled on up the causeway to where it ended in a paved circle, with a bench running all round the wall at the back, and a fountain from some Cardinal's villa—a Triton so mossy that the water would hardly pour from his horn—in the centre. Here they sat down, watching the intermittent jets of the fountain, and Freddy rattled on, to dispel Vicky's "blues." He pointed out the celebrities—the cream of the Conservative Party was on that apple-shaded lawn. He told her the humours of his reformed life; he was really trying to settle down, and the cohort of money-lenders, book-makers and fancy trades of various descriptions who had found in him a light-hearted client, seemed to have been assiduous in their efforts to arrest such senile decay. They were an amusing crowd, and Freddy could tell a story very well. But the stories only served to sadden her, though she sometimes smiled in spite of herself.

Presently John St. Barbe came in search of her, with Lord Vanstry, who had exhausted the arts of persuasion in the vain effort to make Paul join him. Failing to persuade Paul, he had postponed his crusade against Party Government. He had not met Miss Wentworth, and was glad to pay her the compliment of asking to be introduced to her. He was not prepared to meet such a beautiful creature, and so sad. But the sadness he put down to a wrong cause. He could understand Paul's flight being a blow, but now, weeks afterwards, his sister seemed still prostrated. What a pity that Paul had not this fine moral sense! Lord Vanstry carried Vicky off to meet some of his colleagues in the last Conservative Cabinet. Freddy fluttered about like a butterfly in search of a suitable flower. The ladies of his acquaintance, especially the best-looking of the young married women—the expectation class of his salad days—lured him up to say "How do you do?" by the graciousness of their smiles when they nodded. And if he thought that they would be pleasant friends for Vicky,

THE WAGES OF SIN

he was politic, and if he thought that they were "frictious," he was merely polite. Vicky's eyes often rested on him as she was enjoying the weighty honour of listening to the prosings of bearded ex-Ministers of the Crown—men some of whom become Ministers at the age when they would be superannuated from any other employment—peers and lords of many acres, or employers of thousands of artisans. Freddy was honourably inconstant to his former friends. Whenever she looked again, he was talking to someone fresh—always welcome, always that fascinating figure, the man of the world in the outward shape of the fighting soldier, perfectly dressed for the victories of Peace.

John St. Barbe, an admirable host, presently came to her rescue, bringing up what he called the frigate-captains—the dashing men in their forties, of both Houses, who go about the country making fighting speeches at election times and dominate Society. They had a way with them, and interested Vicky, in spite of herself, just as they were interested in the forlorn, pretty sister of the erring Paul. But Vicky was glad when the time came for her to go and take possession of Freddy to see her home. Vivien had gone long before, frankly bored, and sent the car back for them. Vicky was silent as they drove home, but kept a hand on Freddy's arm.

CHAPTER XXX

THE WAGES OF SIN

VICKY was right in surmising that Vivien would let them have a *tête-à-tête* undisturbed. She would even have gone out, if Vicky had asked, so anxious was she for the seed which she had sown to sprout. Generous, even in her misery, Vicky was torn by the injury which Vivien had done to Paul. She must have been unfaithful to Paul for months before he was unfaithful to her. Why could she not have let him know, have let him divorce her and be in a position to offer marriage, instead of an elopement, to Rhoda? There would have been something approaching magnanimity in her liaison with Freddy if she had entered into it to give Paul his freedom, when he

PAUL'S WIFE

so plainly could have Rhoda's love. But no! As it seemed, she had deliberately waited for Paul to mess up his life, too, before she divulged her guilt. Vicky could never forgive her that.

As for Freddy, she gave him full credit for fidelity to herself. She was ready to believe that his liaison with Vivien had happened before he fell in love with herself. In allowing herself to return his affection, she had taken for granted that he had had affairs. How could a man like Freddy, who denied himself nothing and was the idol of women, have escaped them? That he should be only hers in the present and the future was all that she had asked, and that she could not doubt, for she knew how he had repulsed temptations like being asked in when he brought Vivien back from a theatre or an evening-party. But now her house of cards had fallen, unless . . .

These thoughts were passing through her mind when Freddy was announced. She knew by the look on his face that he was true to her, and threw herself into his arms. It was long before either of them spoke. Never had she given herself up to the moment with such abandon. At last she shook herself free and rang for coffee. When they had taken it, Freddy advanced towards her.

"No, Freddy, sit down. We have the greatest thing in the world to talk about, the conflict between love and duty."

"What do you mean, Vicky?"

"I mean that I know about you and Vivien."

"You know what?"

"I think I know more than you, Freddy. Has Vivien told you that she is going to be a mother?"

"Good God, no! Is that true? You would not tell a lie, Vicky, I know you would not tell a lie."

"It's as true as I'm sitting here."

Freddy made no attempt to deny his guilt. He could not tell a lie to Vicky, to anyone so sincere and generous as Vicky. He waited for her to proceed. He wanted to discover what ray of hope there was for him with the woman he adored. But she was turning the matter over in her mind and was silent. So at length he said, "Vicky dear, what is going to happen?"

THE WAGES OF SIN

She did not seem to hear him, for she cried passionately, "You have robbed me of all I value most in life!"

"Not that, Vicky. I know I've been an awful cad, but honour bright, I haven't been unfaithful to you."

"How can you say that?" she cried.

"Because it's true. All this happened before I fell in love with you. I can swear that I have hardly looked at Vivien since."

"But that is unfaithfulness to her."

"No, not really. For it was in a fit of remorse and emptiness, when she had tired of me, that I first understood the perfectness of your womanhood."

"Would to God you hadn't!"

"Why do you say that, Vicky?"

"Because then I should not love you."

"But if you love me and I love you, what does it signify? Two people make the world."

"There is always the life beyond—even if Paul had not fallen like the Morning Star."

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

"Yes, Freddy. We have done sufficient evil in our day."

"I may have, but I'll swear that you haven't."

"Oh, how can you say that, when I've taken you away from Vivien, after she has given you so much?"

"You did not take me away!" he cried hotly. "I told you that she had grown tired of me before . . ."

"Before?"

"Before I came to you. . . . You believe me, Vicky, don't you?"

"Yes, I believe you."

"Then it won't make any difference, this discovery?"

It made no difference to Vicky's love. When she gave her love, she gave it without reserve. And she did not deny this to herself, but duty played the chief string in Vicky's nature, soft, merry creature though she was. And Duty left her no doubts. When she spoke she begged the question of her own marriage with Freddy by a corollary. "You must marry Vivien as soon as the divorce can be arranged."

"But Vivien does not want to marry me, and it would

PAUL'S WIFE

be hell to me to marry Vivien and feel that I was cut off from you for ever."

But Vicky was not to be shaken. She had given her word to renounce him if a certain thing was proved, and even if this had not happened Freddy's duty would have been only too plain to her. But her loss was none the less because she decided so swiftly. She felt as if all the flowers had suddenly disappeared from the earth, as if the sun had left the sky for an Arctic winter. "Freddy, you must go away."

"Go away to-night and never see you again?"

"Of course you'll see me often, when you and Vivien are married."

He could not see the dagger which she was driving into her heart. "I don't mean then, but now," he pleaded miserably.

"No," said the practical Vicky, "you can't go for some days. Things must be settled."

"And may I see you?"

"You will have to see me a great deal, but don't kiss me, Freddy." The look on his face made her add, "Not after to-day. You love me and I love you, but you don't belong to me."

"But if Vivien won't marry me?"

"Vivien must marry you."

Freddy said his lingering good-night. Vicky was an incomparable lover. Looking back on it, Freddy could not judge if it was cruelty or kindness. It was the first time that he had paid Sin its Wages.

* * * * *

Vivien was responsible for all Vicky's dull load of misery. For the whole episode between Freddy and Vicky had been the work of one of her impish freaks. When she grew tired of him, Satan suggested as a bit of mischief to her idle hands that they should make the wise and unerring Vicky fall in love with the discarded Freddy. She showed diabolical ingenuity in emphasizing their good points to each other, without appearing to move a single wire, and when they began to like each other she behaved like an angel. It might have struck Vicky as

THE WAGES OF SIN

suspicious that Vivien—an *enfant terrible* if ever there was one—had not played one jade's trick on them, had never broken in on a *tête-à-tête* in her malicious way—even more, had been really good-natured and accommodating. It had all been so easy and pleasant that she had taken it for granted. The affair was begun and fostered by malice. Then when Freddy's and Vicky's affection for each other was fairly rooted, wayward Vivien's mood changed, and she was so pleased with their happiness that she continued her good behaviour. But such a mood was never permanent with Vivien, and the desire to triumph over Vicky grew stronger and stronger, until she could withstand it no longer. When she had successfully wrecked Vicky's happiness she did not know what more she wanted. She flouted the idea of marrying Freddy.

"But what will the world think?"

"I don't care what the world thinks. I never have cared what the world thinks."

"But you have to care."

"Why should I? I have money enough to do what I like. And I can always have a lover—a fine lover—whenever I choose to whistle for one, wherever I am."

"Men, yes!" said Vicky.

"You know that I can never retain the good opinion of a woman."

This was true, but Vicky was not going to let it stand as an argument. "It's your duty to Paul to marry Freddy."

"I don't see why," said Vivien. "You know that it could not be Paul's child, but nobody else could know that it wasn't, and in the eye of the law it will be his child. I drew your attention to the facts because you were going to marry Freddy. And, if you're so fond of him as it appears, I don't see why you shouldn't marry him."

"You don't see why I shouldn't marry him?"

"No. If I was in love, I'd forgive a man anything. I love Paul well enough to forgive him freely."

"You know very well that he has much more to forgive you than you have to forgive him," retorted Vicky wrathfully.

PAUL'S WIFE

"Of course I do. But it wouldn't prevent my hating him if I didn't love him. Do you love Paul, Vicky?"

"How can you ask?"

"Because I am going to put your love to the proof."

"How?"

"By making you promise that you will never disclose to anyone else that the child is not his. It's my secret."

"I have told Freddy already."

"Freddy doesn't matter. He'll keep the secret for both our sakes when he understands."

"When he understands what?"

Vivien was for once in her life taken aback. She could not find an answer at first. Then she said, "When I tell him why his name has to be kept out of the court."

"And have I not a right to know?"

"Not if you love Paul."

Certain as she felt that it would not injure Paul if she knew why, Vicky said, "I'll promise without your telling me if you'll promise to marry Freddy."

"If I'll promise to marry Freddy, when you want to marry him yourself? It's a funny old world, isn't it? But I'll do anything to oblige. Only what price Freddy? Isn't he to have any say in the matter?"

"No," replied Vicky. "He's to marry you."

"I'm quite agreeable," she said, with a levity incomprehensible to her sister-in-law. "I was tired of him as a lover, but I don't think I should get tired of him as a husband. You needn't see so much of a husband. Besides, he would make me jealous, and that would give me an interest in life." As she was leaving the room she could not resist a Parthian shot. "Are you quite sure that you can spare him, Vicky?"

CHAPTER XXXI

PAUL RE-ENTERS THE ARENA

PAUL and his Virginia were absent from England for three years, leading the life of the gods, remote from human cares and human triumphs, mortal only in the love which illuminated their ambrosial existence. The people who

PAUL RE-ENTERS THE ARENA

met them in their *dahabeah*, moored on the Nile between the ruins of Karnak and the ruins of Thebes, or living in romantic villas outside Athens or Syracuse or their own Rome, were attracted by Rhoda's loveliness, and their being so much in love with each other, before chance betrayed that she had been the most famous woman in British politics and he the Prime Minister of Australia. A lying spirit suggested that they had sacrificed these great positions for their elopement, whereas the elopement was subsequent to her leaving the Liberal Party and some years after he had retired from the Australian Premiership. In any case, travellers' morals are accustomed to take the same liberties as travellers' tales when they meet a beautiful and well-born woman, living in delightful surroundings with a famous man, who is willing to admit them into her charmed circle. They do not ask what business she has to be there; they humour her to the top of her bent, though they may spice their tales with her afterwards. And since Vivien was sympathetically expeditious in "putting her divorcee through," as she phrased it, in a good deal less than a year they rectified their position by marriage at an English Consulate.

Rhoda, who had been schooled in the beauties of ancient and mediæval cities by great scholars and art-critics ever since she was a child, was teaching her brilliant husband to love painting and sculpture and architecture, the last above all, almost as he loved herself. Love and æsthetics filled them with the wine of life. They felt as if they had never been anything but lotus-eaters, so all-sufficing was their hedonism. They might have gone on to the end of their lives pursuing the spirit of beauty in the kingdoms of the sun, but for that dread cataclysm which overtook the world in the first days of August, 1914. There was no need for them to hurry back to England with their two beautiful boys, to avoid imprisonment; the land they were in did not draw the sword for months after the outbreak. But Paul longed to be back in England, to fight the danger against which he had warned the sleepy Ostriches in vain, and Rhoda longed to have him in the lists again.

PAUL'S WIFE

He received no mandate from the Prime Minister. The arch-opportunist was afraid of the burning zeal, the uncompromising patriotism of the Australian, and did not relish the presence of an outspoken ex-Prime Minister. But Paul soon found his niche in frustrating the conspiracy of the Cabinet against the Press, a conspiracy which pretended to conceal the high policy of our rulers from the Germans, but was devised to conceal their incapacity from the public. So stern was the censorship of the Press that the enslavement of the nation was almost complete. Only one newspaper proprietor defied the censor, and he was crippled at every turn until he thought of Paul Wentworth and offered to supply him with facts if Paul would make himself a living newspaper and trumpet the truth daily at some great public meeting. So strict was the censorship of letters that he went in person to Italy to ask Paul. Paul agreed, and suddenly found himself the voice of the nation, for which his dauntless courage, his uncompromisingness, and his blazing eloquence made him singularly fit.

In the Social battle they found an unexpected and inconsistent ally in Lady Lyonesse. She was mad with them for what they had done, and except on political business, never opened her lips to them in private. Domestically, in spite of the political truce, she kept a wall of hatred between them. But since, in the years before the war, her chief object in life, as the rebellious wife of a Liberal leader, had been to tear down the shams with which England was being betrayed to Germany, and since the Press censorship was being used to perpetuate these shams, and her son-in-law was the Samson who could throw down the walls of the Philistine temple, she felt it her duty to lock up her private wrongs in her heart and do her bit in demolishing the secret Star Chamber of the Press Censor. She defined her attitude to her daughter soon after the Wentworths had returned to England. They were staying in a little house in Cowley Street, Westminster, which John St. Barbe, living at Richmond, kept as a convenience for Parliamentary work. She wrote to her daughter :

PAUL RE-ENTERS THE ARENA

“DEAR MRS. WENTWORTH,

“I don’t wish my private animosities to stand in the way of the salvation of our country. I regard Mr. Wentworth as the person best qualified to save it and therefore entitled to my support. It is plain that the best way I can give it is by appearing to forgive you, as your weak-minded father has done. This I am willing to do. You and your husband can come to our houses as much as you like. You can even establish yourselves in Lyonesse House, if our country has anything to gain by it. I will go about with you, so as to strengthen your Social position, and when we are before the public, our relations shall appear to be exactly what they have always been.

“But all this is on one condition—that our reconciliation shall be a whited sepulchre. I haven’t forgiven you and never shall forgive you for the way in which you have disgraced me, and you must promise me—both you and your husband—when you happen to be with me alone, to maintain absolute silence on all subjects except politics. I mean to cut you dead in private.

“Let me know in as few words as possible if you agree.

“Yours truly,

“C. LYONESSE.”

To which Rhoda, after consulting with Paul, telegraphed her reply :

“Agreed, if I may tell the St. Barbes.—R. WENTWORTH.”

Lady Lyonesse telegraphed back :

“In confidence, yes.—C. LYONESSE.”

John St. Barbe had almost a personal grievance in the matter, because Rhoda was a connection of his wife’s and his whole training and instincts condemned what Rhoda and Paul had done. But he saw that their sin must be forgiven, or the influence of Paul, his old brother-in-arms in the Universal Service League, so great an asset to the country, must suffer. Therefore

PAUL'S WIFE

he, who disapproved of divorce even for the innocent party, led the way in accepting the Wentworths socially, by lending them his Westminster house. Most Conservative politicians followed him in condoning their past. In such a matter no one's lead could be better than John St. Barbe's. Since Rhoda was as much a politician as her husband, he saw them both daily in the library of the Cowley Street house, which had suddenly become a focus for the dissemination of news, like a newspaper-office. He was glad that patriotism had made him accept their marriage; for when he saw Rhoda's unbroken pride and innocence and their romantic affection for each other, his antipathy to divorce was shaken.

Conservative hostesses, too, on the whole kept their compact. Rhoda was besieged by callers who, whatever they said behind her back, welcomed her to the Party household as the Prodigal Son's wife. Her personal value was not small. As an ex-organizer of the "Ostriches," she would, they thought, make a good *point d'appui* for the numerous deserters. But when Rhoda was established in a house of her own and had to begin the concentration systematically, she found it uphill work. It was not so easy for the "cave" of important and wealthy people who had finished with "Ostrich" Liberalism, like herself, to come to her house as it was for the Conservatives. A revengeful little reptile, like Matthew Purdy, could scare them with the venomous epigram that Rhoda's defection was "adultery coupled with desertion." The younger Liberals, who had been more Rhoda's personal friends than her father's, had not abandoned "Ostrichism" to the same degree. They had their careers before them, and were rather fascinated with the idea of being terrible fellows. Mr. and Mrs. Robespierre Bullion—Mr. and Mrs. Cassius De Beers—that was how they appeared to themselves. It was convenient for them to think Rhoda a wicked woman. She knew what sybarites these tribunes from Portland Place were, and how slender were their claims—beyond the possession of wealth—to take part in the administration of their country. They tried to keep up the social

UNRELENTING

barrier against her. And now she cared—not for the sake of her home-life; there Paul and her children were all-sufficient for her and the opinion of the world nothing, at any rate since the Conservative hostesses had taken upon themselves to accept her—but because her political energies were reawakened. She wanted to wield the influence which she had once wielded, for Paul, and for England as Paul saw it. And she was determined to organize the War Liberals who, with few exceptions, chiefly Welsh, were drifting about in a rudderless way, having got up only sufficient steam to scrap their shibboleths.

The Conservative ladies continued their attentions. Paul was in the inmost councils of the Party. But the revolvers of Lyonesse House had shown no signs of making a focus of Catesby House, the Elizabethan mansion stranded in Westminster to which the Wentworths removed from Cowley Street. Paul and his wife had a good deal of time to themselves still. Rhoda did not know whether to be grateful for this or not. She loved Paul better every day, but from the hour that the Conservatives had agitated for his return to politics, she had set her heart on seeing him in the inner circle of the Cabinet, and this meant work, work, work. She determined to disregard the risk of social snubs and to start her task of concentrating the War-Liberals into a powerful organization by personal canvassing.

CHAPTER XXXII

UNRELENTING

SHE was to meet with something worse than Social snubs. Lady Lyonesse's indignation with the culprits knew no bounds, though she had been so fond of Paul as well as Rhoda. Nor was it unnatural, seeing that Paul had run away with the daughter whom she had expected to capture a Duke, or something very like it. Prior to this, she would not have believed that anything would have made her disagree with "the gentleman of the House of Commons." But when he said to her, "Paul Wentworth

PAUL'S WIFE

is the greatest man in the Empire—bar the combatants—can't you forgive him, Caroline ? ” she said, “ No, Saint, I can't, and I don't understand your asking me to.”

“ I'm truly sorry, Caroline. Even if you can't do that, can you harden your heart against Roe ? ”

“ Yes, Saint, I can. I can hate as well as any woman in England, but the public shan't know it. I'm a Fenwick ; I'm game, if I'm nothing else.”

If it had not been for Paul's sake, Rhoda would have repaid her mother in her own coin, for her easy-going father, the parent to whom she was far more closely attached, when he found how chivalrous Paul was to his daughter, and what a commanding position he had among politicians, proceeded along the lines of easiest resistance—frankly constituting himself his son-in-law's political henchman, which presented no difficulties, since Paul had become an out-and-out Lloyd-Georgeite. How was the public to guess that Lady Lyonesse, when she accompanied her daughter on to the platform, which she had never done in Rhoda's orthodox days, and annotated her approval of the fiery cross of Paul's eloquence by smiles and glances to his wife, was acting a part, and in her heart was cursing the beautiful and brilliant girl who was the only child that had ever sucked at her breast ?

Paul would have no truce. He was not as solicitous for his advancement as Rhoda was, and if his mother-in-law would not forgive his wife, he would have none of her ; whereas of Lord Lyonesse, because he was magnanimous to Rhoda, he made the greatest *confidant* of all in his lonely political greatness—a situation made easier by the fact that Paul himself was too wealthy to be affected by Lord Lyonesse's money. As Paul Wentworth's recognized intermediary, the ex-Liberal host was a more real force in politics than in the palmiest days of Lyonesse House. The connection brought father and daughter as close together as ever they had been, and Rhoda, having been forgiven so much, idolized the sunny-tempered mediocrity almost as much as her leonine husband, and was proportionately happy, except when she remembered her self-torturing mother, who would have made such a good mother for Paul. She had little opportunity of

UNRELENTING

forgetting it. For from afternoon meetings, they often had to drive away together, and then the contrast was shrivelling. As they passed from the platform on which Paul had been the voice of the Empire, flinging defiance at the Hun, there would generally be one or other of the Conservative chiefs escorting Paul's wife and her mother to the car, pouring out eloquent tributes to his greatness—a homage from one of the most honoured names in England. A minute afterwards, as the car was spinning along to Lyonesse House, her ladyship would be sitting up with a mouth drawn like a shark's, stonily silent. Her Junius Brutus attitude brought deep distress to Rhoda, who loved her mother ardently, and had always admired the way in which she had refused to bow the knee when their house was the Liberal Party's House of Rimmon; but it did not bring repentance: Rhoda was conscious that she "would live the same life over if she had to live again."

When they reached the house, the same grim comedy would be played. To the chauffeur and the footmen mother and daughter seemed to be on the natural terms of affection, just as they would have been if nothing had happened. But when the servants left them to their tea, Nemesis threw her cold shadow between them; Rhoda rested in the disgrace which she deserved. If Lord Lyonesse came in, Lady Lyonesse left the room, whether she had finished her tea or not; she would not be a witness to his weakness. This caused him to feel that he had to make up to Rhoda for her mother's coldness. It was killing three birds with one stone for him to yield to his inclinations, have the sensation of magnanimity, and serve his country's interests. It did not quite make up to Rhoda for the defection of the sterner parent, though it was true that she expected less quarter than she had received in that direction.

Once, when they had returned from one of Paul's triumphs, Lady Lyonesse forgot her stipulation that they should only converse about politics, and her indignation displayed itself in words. "Only think how proud we should have been to-day, Rhoda, if you hadn't spoilt it by doing that!"

PAUL'S WIFE

"Mother dear, we shouldn't have been there. You had washed Paul out of my life."

Lady Lyonesse took no heed of the defence; nor was she more topical in the attack. "I never thought that a child of mine would forget that she was a lady. I could have forgiven anything else. But to dress up in your maid's clothes and run away with a married man, when you were all that we had to carry on the family, and had been made heir to your father's honours. . . . !"

"I feel all this," said Rhoda, "as deeply as you do, and I should never have done it if you had not forced me."

"How did I force you?"

"You separated me from him; you neither let me see him nor write to him; you shut me up like a prisoner, though I was six-and-twenty, and accustomed to exceptional liberty."

"Well, I had to stop your meeting somehow."

"And not content with that, you were going to make the sea sever us by taking me to Java on the yacht, so that meetings should be absolutely impossible."

"Why not? It was wrong for you to meet."

"Why not? Because meeting Paul was my life to me."

"Life, indeed? You were better dead!"

"Why couldn't you trust me, mother? Until you put your spoke in, our meetings had been entirely innocent. I had only a platonic love for Paul. I put him on a pedestal and worshipped him. But I had no more idea of giving him any personal attachment than I had of giving it to Mr. Lloyd George, when I was delirious with enthusiasm over his National Insurance scheme."

"I wonder what his wife thought of it all?"

"She liked me as much as he did. She told me so. She is very candid about her dislikes."

"She might have liked you personally, without wishing you to see quite so much of her husband."

"I had her assurance to the contrary. She said more than once, 'The more you see of him the better—it makes him less like a sore with a bare head.'"

"She had an elegant way of expressing herself."

"Candour and slang go hand-in-hand. If she had

HOW RHODA FOUND VIVIEN WITH PAUL

wished to be hypocritical, she would have clothed it in decent language."

"It would have been difficult to import any decency into it. The whole affair was disgraceful!"

"I must admit that, but it was, as I have proved, entirely your fault."

"You had no business to take the law into your own hands."

"What did you want me to do? To get Paul to apply for a writ of *habeas corpus*?" Neither she nor her mother saw the unintentional play on words. To her mother the phrase meant absolutely nothing; she had never heard of the Habeas Corpus Act.

"I wanted you to keep the Fifth Commandment, to honour your father and mother."

Rhoda had desired more fervently that her mother should keep the Eighth Commandment, by not trying to steal her happiness, but she did not say so. She wished the unpleasant dialogue to die down, so she put on a conciliatory expression and held her peace. Which her mother interpreted as Rhoda's acknowledgment of defeat. So Rhoda rose to go. In those days they did not even shake hands, except in public.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HOW RHODA FOUND VIVIEN WITH PAUL

RHODA had had a long day at it, and had arrived home for tea dead tired. How she hoped that Paul would be in the quiet little room overlooking the garden—their "Privy Council" room, to which strangers were never admitted. "Is your master in, Jevons?" she asked the smart parlour-maid—Paul still insisted on all women servants, moderate in number.

"Yes, ma'am. He is in the little room with a lady."

"What lady?"

"She wouldn't give any name, ma'am. But she must be a very old friend, ma'am."

The girl's words, spoken with perfect civility and apparently without *arrière-pensée*, smote Rhoda's heart heavily. Paul need not have allowed her into that room,

PAUL'S WIFE

however old a friend she was. And who was this old friend who was so intimate? There was no friend Paul had talked about who seemed to fit the situation. As she neared the door, she partly shook off her depression in the happiness of getting back to Paul. But when she opened the door, she could have fainted, if she had known how, for there, pouring out her heart to Paul, was Vivien—Paul's first wife. Both came forward to meet her. Vivien held out her hand cordially. Paul kissed her, and putting his arm round her, led her to the arm-chair in which he had been sitting, and seating her in it, sat himself down on the arm, with a hand on her shoulder. It was only then that Rhoda noticed Vivien's widow's weeds—very fashionable weeds, with their black and white crêpe particularly becoming to Vivien's red eyes and hair and transparent complexion. Rhoda began, without the irony of the question striking her: "Have you lost your husband, Mrs. Fenwick?"

"Mayn't it be Vivien?"

"May it? It is for you to say."

"Vivien, please. Yes, poor Freddy's gone, just before the War. He died like the sport that he was." In cold print this slangy summary of her husband's death may look brutal, yet it suited the man and his widow as no other *euthanasia* could have done. One thing was clear, that unless Vivien was the most consummate hypocrite, she meant them no harm. Her voice told that without putting it into words.

"It's lucky that you didn't come in five minutes earlier, Rhoda," said the *enfant terrible*.

"Why?" asked Rhoda, with a little shudder, for she knew that she must be prepared for a shock.

"Because you would have found me in Paul's arms."

Rhoda was confident of Paul; she was not indignant. But she was flustered, and both of them noticed it. She waited for Vivien to explain.

"I was being forgiven," said Vivien, and Paul said, "I'm not evading, but I'll wait until Vivien has finished."

"Forgiven for what?" asked the puzzled Rhoda.

"For divorcing Paul instead of his divorcing me."

"How could he?"

HOW RHODA FOUND VIVIEN WITH PAUL

"Well, he could have before . . ."

"I understand, but I'm afraid that he did not know it," said the equally candid Rhoda.

"That doesn't matter," replied Vivien. "Paul will tell you why I did not take the blame until this afternoon."

The mystified expression on Rhoda's face showed that she had not seen the afternoon's papers. Vivien handed them to her as she might have passed her the salt at lunch. Rhoda read the top one, with a little catch in her throat at the thought of having robbed this woman of her husband. When she had read the top one she laid the bundle down. "I see," she said. "He was loving you for being so generous."

Vivien was touched by Rhoda's consideration in using the word "loving" instead of "kissing" or "embracing."

"I suppose it was that," she said humbly.

Rhoda was as touched by this humility as Vivien had been by her consideration. It was so unlike Vivien. "May I kiss you, too?" she asked.

"Don't get up," said Vivien, stepping to where Rhoda sat and stooping for their lips to meet. "Then you didn't mind our kissing?" asked Vivien.

"No," said Rhoda.

"I'm glad you didn't, for I'm sure I shall do it again. I love him so dearly as a friend, though I failed to love him as a husband."

"I don't deserve to get off so cheaply as this," said Paul. "I kissed her because I could not resist it, and was thoroughly ashamed of myself. I was sure that I should be caught."

"I don't think that it is natural for you not to do it, when you are feeling friendly. I shall expect you to. It's better for you to do it with my knowledge and approval, than in the way which you did it just now, Paul dear. It is better for sensible human beings. If you do it as a matter of course, it will be a safety valve."

"It will," said Vivien. "I only wanted it then as a reward for being good."

Rhoda could not help smiling at Vivien's *naïveté*. *Naïveté* has its uses. Here it established a frank friendship.

CHAPTER XXXIV

VIVIEN'S CONFESSION

PAUL had been in the little room, piled up in an arm-chair, absorbed in the materials of a coming speech—in the position which Vivien knew so well—when the maid had ushered her in an hour before, announced simply—by her own request—as “A lady to see you, sir.” He began hastily to relieve himself of the newspapers, notebooks and pamphlets arranged in a heap on his knee, which looked like pure disorder but had their method. But Vivien glided swiftly across to him, and kissed him in her old way, crying, “Sit still, Paul—don’t make a stranger of me.”

“What have you come for?” he asked resolutely.

“To see you, and . . .”

“Rhoda.”

“And Rhoda, if she is in.”

“Rhoda is not in.”

“So much the better.”

“But it is simply impossible to be seeing you like this!” he said, shooting all his papers on to the floor, in utter recklessness of the clues.

Vivien gave one of her old smiles. “Nothing is impossible—especially to you, Paul.”

“But. . . .”

“Be sensible. This thing has got to be talked out. You’d better hear what I’ve got to say, anyhow.”

Paul, as a politician, had always been ready to hear what an adversary had to say. It weakened malice, and gave him points for his speeches. Fear of anyone’s tongue was as unknown to him as fear of their fists. His habit had given him a rough quarter of an hour in one way or the other sometimes, but it had made coalition easier, and there had been a good deal of non-party legislation in the first days of the Australian Parliament. But it was not the habit of Australian political enemies to come with smooth faces and phrases to veil their

VIVIEN'S CONFESSION

attack—that belonged to diplomacy, not politics, and few diplomats came to Australia, except Governors sent out from England to prevent friendly Australia from becoming a republic in form as well as in reality, or foreign commercial envoys, who came to claim the “most favoured nation” treatment. Political enemies began with bluster, and indignation was their stock-in-trade. Vivien, in this mood, would cajole him into security and then, when she had got behind his guard, would use a metaphorical dagger. And he objected to having the interview at all, except in the presence of Rhoda. So he said quite sternly, “What do you want, Vivien?”

“I want to be your greatest friend—after your wife.”

The last three words rather disarmed him. It would have been more like Vivien to pour vitriol on the idea of his present union being a marriage at all, and she had used the words with perfect simplicity, as if there was no more to be said about it. So he mollified a little.

“I’m very fond of you, Paul. I’m more in love with you now than I ever was, after I had got over my girlhood’s passion for you.” She saw his face harden again. “Don’t be frightened—I’m not going to try and run away with you.” He did not like pleasantries on the subject. She could see that, and with the persistence in attaining an object desired which had always characterized her, she changed her methods. “Look here, Paul, I’m not up to any of my tricks. I’ve come here to discuss the situation fairly and squarely. And I’m your friend. But you must hear what I’ve got to say.”

“Honour bright?”

“Honest Injun.”

“Well?”

“I’ve an odd reason for falling in love with you again, but I suppose it isn’t odd for me. I admire you for leaving me. I made life impossible, and it wasn’t right for a man of your spirit to put up with it.” His face grew troubled, but it lightened as she proceeded. “You got on my nerves; you bored me; I hated you. I must have bored you too. But you had other things to think about, and you always had a way of dismissing disagreeables from your thoughts while I sat in my room

PAUL'S WIFE

distilling them. If you hadn't run away from me, I should have run away from you before long—I couldn't have stood it much longer."

"Is it profitable, this conversation, Vivy?" He was softened by the old familiar frankness of the wife of his youth—the "Vivy" told her that, and it helped her not to beat about the bush.

"I may as well tell you at once that I had deceived you."

"But, Vivy," he said, with his first smile, "you were always deceiving me. It was the only amusement you cared about."

"Not in that way, Paul."

"What do you mean?"

"I never really cared about men until poor Freddy came along."

"He's dead!" interjected Paul.

Big tears formed in Vivien's eyes. She gave a little nod and went on, "My passion for you was an intellectual one. It was pride in your achievements. Until I got bored with our marriage I liked its physical side in a quiet way, but I never cared for it. Indeed, I thought it a pity that men and women could not live together without it. I see now that this was the origin of our unhappiness. I should have been grateful to you when you began to drift away from me, if I had had anything to fill my life. Then Freddy came. I was impressed with him from the beginning. It was the first time that I had been thrown into constant contact with the dashing English type. His clothes struck me first; he was always so perfectly-dressed, poor dear! We don't get perfectly-dressed men in Australia, do we, Paul?"

"Australia wouldn't stand them. But I see their uses."

"I was even more impressed with his manners. For while he 'sir'd' you because he was your adviser, as he used to 'sir' his Colonel in the Army, and treated you with the deference he'd given to his Colonel, and Vicky and me one minute as the Colonel's relations and the next as attractive women, he was such a spoilt boy, with all the titled people he was connected-with by birth."

VIVIEN'S CONFESSION

"Yes, I noticed that, too. But it made me want to get rid of him for being such a puppy."

"And he was so naughty," she said, half to herself. "In Australia, only a woman could be as naughty as he was—and not many women, except me." Paul was beginning to chafe. "I really have something to say, if you'll be patient with me, Paul dear." His eyes smiled a little. Vivien was beautiful, and when she was penitent, she had great womanly charm. He began to be glad that she had not gone out of his life. "Well, I want to tell you how it happened!"

"What happened?"

"Wait and see!" She did not remember that this was a political byword. "Well, Vicky," she continued, "fell awfully in love with him, and he was fast falling in love with her when I grew jealous and cut in. It was hard work to get him away from Vicky; I had to use my whole power as a woman. I did not know what men could be. You were the only man who had ever kissed me or made love to me in Australia, and you are so steady and reliable."

"It doesn't look as if I was very reliable."

"Oh, yes, you are. Your eyes would never have rested on another woman if I could have been decent to you."

"I am glad you think so well of me, Vivy, but go on." He was really interested now.

"Oh, well, there isn't much to say, except that poor Freddy, Freddy the prim and immaculate in his appearance, was as primitive as a savage compared to you. He did not understand. It never dawned upon him that I was playing, that I only wished to take him from Vicky in a flirtation. He thought I was offering him more, and his will-power dominated me. Before I knew which way to turn I was his mistress, and when once I had learned the breadth and depth of his passion I was his slave."

Paul's face grew white with restrained anger; he did his best to restrain it because it was against the dead. "The scoundrel!" he muttered. "While he was eating my bread!"

"It was my fault, Paul. I made him do it. I did not realize what my behaviour meant to a primitive man."

PAUL'S WIFE

"It was indefensible of Fenwick. He ought to have come to me and . . ."

" . . . Lost his income and lost a lover. Poor Freddy was incapable of such heroism as that. He didn't mind dying like a hero—he did die like a hero—but he didn't want to live like one. It was my fault, I tell you, Paul. I tried him beyond the endurance of flesh and blood."

Paul's expression grew terrible. "When did all this happen?"

"While you were planning your elopement with Rhoda St. Ives."

"I didn't plan it. It came upon us like a thunderstorm," he cried hotly, but then he cast his eyes down and kept them glued to the floor. He was telling himself that Vivien's fall might never have happened if Vivien's natural protector had been more at her side.

Vivien thought he was being obstinate, and said, "At any rate, you went away with her directly afterwards."

"I know," he said. "I can't blame you."

"And then I instituted the proceedings against you for divorce, and as you did not defend, and the Judge was so sorry for poor Lord Lyonesse, it was put through, and they gave me a *decree nisi* in the shortest possible time." Paul buried his face in his hands. Vivien babbled on in her inconsequent way. "And all the time he was in love with Vicky."

Paul blazed out again. "Do you mean to say that he dared to press his odious attentions on her, too?"

"No, no. That was what cut me so and made me trade upon his passions—I couldn't stand his calf-love for Vicky."

"Thank God for his calf-love."

"I can say that too, now. But I had awful trouble with Vicky. Freddy had asked her to marry him, and nothing would make her give him up until I told her that I was going to have a child by him, and then she made him promise to marry me as soon as my divorce from you was made absolute."

"And what became of the child?"

"He is at our flat—the flat you took for me when we came to England."

VIVIEN'S CONFESSION

“ And what is he called ? ”

“ Paul Wentworth Fenwick. He had to take the surname of Fenwick, as he was born after my marriage with Freddy, and as he was born almost immediately after the marriage I had in common decency and self-defence to call him something which would make people think he was your child—besides, I hadn't at that time fallen in love with Freddy again, and I felt very fond of you.”

“ Vivien, I never knew such a cynical, incomprehensible woman ! ”

“ I may be incomprehensible, but I am not cynical. I am only undisciplined.”

“ Call it what you like ! ”

“ We must go back a little. Some time after you had gone away with Rhoda, I got tired of kicking against the pricks. I could see that I only had to take my eyes off Freddy for him to fly back to Vicky, and my pride was up. I determined to let him go back and have my revenge on Vicky, to let her know what it was to be torn with jealousy and shame, as I had been. So I suddenly changed and threw him into her way as much as possible. He didn't need much throwing. He had never ceased to love her, and in a few days they were engaged. The marriage was an impossible one. I knew that from the beginning. Freddy's income from you would soon cease, and the income you had settled on Vicky would not have been enough for Freddy as a bachelor, let alone for the two of them, if he was to keep out of debt. Then I managed that David Shand should hear about it. He and everyone else tried to stop it, but without effect; they were so in love with each other. Then I confessed to Vicky that I was soon going to be a mother, and who the father was. There was an awful scene. I thought they'd go mad—Vicky because she could not marry him after what had happened, Freddy because one of his sins had come home to roost, because he had been found out in something which robbed him of the dearest wish of his life. But Vicky would not give in, and as soon as my decree against you was made absolute, she forced Freddy to marry me.”

PAUL'S WIFE

"A very pretty story, Vivien! I can see that it is true. I hope you were happy!" said Paul, with concentrated scorn.

"I made up my mind that I hated the marriage, that I would never live with him, and I promised to give him ten pounds a week living expenses so long as he did not force himself on me. He agreed with me that it was ordinary decency for him to go on living in his chambers until the child, which the world believed to be yours, was born. It was born, and christened Paul Wentworth Fenwick, as you know. At this time my mind was fully made up that I would make Freddy go on living in chambers always. He was awfully gentlemanly about it. He said he was ready to do it as long as it suited me—that he would go on living in them without making any declaration or arrangement, if he might have unrestricted access to the house during the day and was allowed to see as much of the child as he liked. As I had plenty of confidence in my strength of mind to cut off his allowance if he abused his privileges, I consented. I must say that I admired the way in which he kept his bargain; though he was very fond of Fenwick Minor, as he preferred to call him, he always left the nursery when I entered it. He came or telephoned every morning to know if I wanted anything, though I always said no. He spent just the right amount of time in the house to satisfy Mother Grundy, but never stayed to a meal unless I pressed him, and never made love to me in any way. And he always came perfectly turned out, and brought me violets."

"Why are you telling me all this rigmarole, Vivien? Are you trying to curry favour with me by demonstrating that you and Fenwick never lived together as man and wife after you were married—or what?"

"Oh, Paul, do wait and see. I really have something important on my mind."

Paul was so incensed that he felt inclined to say, "I wish you would get it off on me as soon as possible!" But a quarter of a century of politics had given him some experience as a mind-reader, and he was sure that Vivien had something vital to say, if she could only

VIVIEN'S CONFESSION

check her forensic propensities and get to the point, so he said to her, with the manner that had won him almost as many votes as his brains and his backbone, "I'm sure that you have something to tell me, Vivy, and I suppose I'd better let you do it in your own way."

* * * * *

"You're certainly taking me at my word," he said, as she proceeded :

"This went on I don't know how long. I was not feeling strong enough to do much, and the child was a new toy. But when I was thoroughly strong again, one day I said to Freddy, when he came round, 'Freddy, take me out somewhere to-night. I need a change.' He said, 'The very thing ! What shall we do ? We'll dine out, of course. Shall it be at the Club or at a restaurant ? And then we'll go and see Hawtrey, and then we'll go back and have supper at the Club, because it has no early-closing like there is at an hotel, and then I'll see you to your door.' Paul, I never enjoyed myself so much in my life. Poor Freddy was adorable ; there was not a better-turned-out man in the room at the Club, and there must have been five hundred people in it. And you know what a baby I am about that !" she added, suddenly realizing the reflection that what she was saying cast on Paul. "He did the thing superbly, though he couldn't afford it out of the allowance I was giving him. He was discretion itself during the dinner, and at the play and at supper after the play. He behaved as if he were still your secretary, instead of my husband. And when we got back to the flat and he opened the door with my latch-key, he took up his hat and ran downstairs. I ran to the landing and called after him, 'Freddy ! Freddy !' He came up again hesitatingly. 'You must come in and have a whiskey and soda,' I said. 'I can't let you go like this after you have given me such a jolly night !' "

"I know the rest," said Paul dryly.

"Yes, I think you know the rest," said Vivien, "that is, up to a certain point."

"And afterwards ?"

PAUL'S WIFE

"I gave him that latch-key."

"And?"

"I thought that it was the most delightful way that a husband and wife could live together. Freddy took me everywhere; he was devoted, but he lived in his chambers and paid stolen visits to me."

"Oh, Vivien, what is the good of telling me all this? Are you doing it to pain me, or from a sort of disease, because you can't help yourself?"

"Patience, Paul, patience! We're not far from the end now. Well, this plan worked splendidly until I grew so fond of him that I could not bear his going away at all, and then he came and lived in the flat like any other good husband, and he turned out so well—considering. No, I oughtn't to say considering. He really turned over a new leaf. For if he had nothing to do except enjoy himself and make me enjoy myself, he did that well. I never knew what it was to be bored."

"Fenwick was a genius!" said Paul, thinking aloud more than addressing Vivien; he was rather sore at Vivien's making him listen to all this; he felt that it was undignified and his patience was nearly exhausted, when he remembered that Freddy was dead, and asked with feeling, "What was the end of it all, Vivy? How did poor Fenwick die?"

"It was coming down the hill at Slapton, in Devonshire. We were having the loveliest motoring tour. We were staying at the Slapton Hotel, where people go for fishing in the lake. I hate fishing, and it was out of the season, but we were all alone except for the hotel people, and so far from anything—I forget how far we were from Dartmouth; perhaps it was ten miles—but I had run out of chocolates, and Freddy said he'd run into Dartmouth with the car and get them while I was having my siesta after lunch. When I woke up, I went to meet him at the bottom of the hill to get into the car. I was terrified at that hill; it isn't safe for any vehicle to go down, and I'd sworn I'd go back to town by some other way. I heard the car's toot just when I got to within a stone's throw of the bottom of the hill. I knew the toot—it was my own car that we

VIVIEN'S CONFESSION

were using. An instant afterwards it came charging down the hill. At that moment the pet lamb of the little child who lives in the public house at the bottom of the hill broke away from its string and ran into the road with the child after it. Freddy could have passed the child, but he would have run over the lamb, and the child was as fond of the lamb as he was of the child. He knew the danger of putting the brake on coming down a hill like that at the pace he was using—he was a first-rate driver, though he was so reckless—but rather than kill the child's lamb, he did it, and the next instant the car had turned a somersault. When his body was taken out, I shouldn't have recognized him, and the lamb hopped about bleating, with the child chasing it, until I could have killed them both."

"And that is what you had to tell me?" said Paul, much softened, for he had liked Freddy, in spite of all his faults. "The episode is over now. Isn't that so, Vivy?"

"No, I haven't come to it yet," she said, when her emotion allowed her to answer him. "But I am coming to it now. Paul, I have done you a great wrong."

"Well, you have confessed it, and I am not one to harbour malice."

"But I haven't confessed it yet. And that is what weighs on my soul. You ought to have divorced me, not me you. I was Freddy's mistress before you thought of going off with Rhoda. If you had only known, you had all the right under heaven to get rid of me and marry her."

"What you did does not alter what I did, Vivy," he said quietly. He forbore to add that as far as heaven was concerned he thought he had done quite right—that it was she who was concerned in the matter, not the Ten Commandments. He was not prepared for her reply, though he had always found her ready to brush away conventionalities in her own favour with ruthless clear-sightedness. Vivien had intuition; she read his thoughts now.

"You are too just to excuse yourself, and yet you feel that you did right. I think so too. You were

PAUL'S WIFE

justified in beginning a new life. I spent my life in proving incompatibility of temper."

"Then you condone what I have done?"

"I approve of it, dear. I have lost a husband whose good qualities I never could appreciate, and found a friend whom I love. But let me get on, Paul."

He could not help laughing—the kind little laugh of sheer amusement, the laugh which had saved him more than once when things were at the breaking point in politics. "You know I've tried to get you to the point all the afternoon, Vivy."

"You always spoilt my stories, Paul, by wanting to reach the end like the non-stop train for Ealing." She said this without any intonation for Ealing in her voice. The idea of Ealing had not presented itself to her.

"I suppose so."

"But now, Paul, listen. I tried to do one good thing in my life, and I failed." She had gradually drawn nearer to him. He brushed the hair off her forehead gently—an old gesture of his. "When I heard that you had gone off with Rhoda I had to do something."

"Yes."

"I went to see Sir George Salmon, the famous divorce lawyer, to instruct him to tell your lawyers that they were in a position to bring the proceedings for divorce against me, since I was unfaithful to you long before you left me."

"What did he say?"

"He said it was very generous, reflected great honour on me, etc., etc., but simply couldn't be done, because its only effect would be to take away the power of the judge to grant the divorce. He admitted that it was a rotten state of affairs that the law should take such a view, but said that it was the law, so it couldn't be helped."

"That was noble of you, Vivy."

"I'm not done yet, Paul. I said, 'Very well, then things must stand as they are. I'm not going to drag Paul into the Divorce Court.' He showed me that I must, that it would be best for you to have your freedom, and that this was the only way you could get it. So I let him put it through. Was I right, Paul?"

VIVIEN'S CONFESSION

"Yes, of course you were, dear. It let me marry Rhoda, and I can tell you that there are plenty of wives who would have forfeited their own freedom to rob me of that satisfaction. But you were never a dog in the manger, Vivy."

"No, I don't think I was, in my very evillest mood. But you haven't got to the point yet."

"You are like the Princess in the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"What did *she* do, Paul?" asked Vivien, who never pretended.

"Always began a new story before she finished the last, so that the Caliph, wanting to hear the story, might let her live another day."

She made no rejoinder; she was too excited about her secret. Now that she had come to the point, her confidence failed her. There was a pause of painful hesitation before she handed him the bundle of the afternoon's papers which she had brought with her. He caught a tremendous headline on one, printed on a greenish paper:

SOCIETY LADY AND THE DIVORCE COMMISSION.

Underneath it ran these words:

"Mrs. Frederiek Tradescant Fenwick, who was, when they came to England a few years ago, the wife of Mr. Wentworth, the paradox ex-Premier of Australia, has written the following letter to the President of the Royal Commission upon the Divoree Laws now sitting. . . ."

underneath which was printed the letter signed "Vivien Fenwick."

"Read it!" she cried, seeing that he was chivalrously about to hand it back to her, instead of satisfying an unavoidable curiosity. As he read it, astonishment broadened over his face, for the letter was to draw the attention of the President to what the writer called a failure of justice under the present law. It pointed out in language which was not very grammatical, but was wonderful in its choice of the right word to convey a situation, that she was the offending party, that not only had she driven her husband into elopement by an unparalleled incompatibility, but that she had actually misconducted herself

PAUL'S WIFE

with Captain Fenwick before the Wentworth-St. Ives elopement was dreamt of.

"Yet," the letter ran, "Mr. Wentworth could not vindicate himself, nor I confess the wrongs which I had done him, before the Court, without causing the intervention of the King's Proctor. I, who broke the marriage, had to deal the blow, and he had to forfeit the sympathies of the public in silence. The accident of the death of Captain Fenwick, who recently gave his life so heroically, leaves me free to repair the injustice as far as I can. But I protest against the state of the law, which, on the principle of two negatives making an affirmative, decrees that if both parties to a marriage instead of one incur the penalty of divorce, no divorce shall be granted. I have no hope of the injustice being repealed. The British Parliament has lost its sanity. But now that I am beyond the reach of the law and otherwise free to speak, I wish the facts to be known in justice to Mr. Wentworth, for whom I have the highest admiration and respect."

"Do you mean to tell me that this letter is in all the evening papers, Vivy?"

"Yes."

"Good God!" He looked at her. She ran into his arms and he held her there. The air was charged with Fate. What if Rhoda came in at this minute? She ought to have been here already. At length Vivien disengaged herself gently, and Paul found words. "How quixotically generous of you?"

"It was common justice."

"Common justice or no, you know what Society will say, not only of you, but to you."

"My dear, I don't know and don't care. I don't want to go to their dull crushes. I don't need to bore myself with their dinners. I have enough money to pay for my own champagne at a restaurant. They can't prevent me taking seats at the theatre; they can't warn me off race-courses, or order shops not to serve me. And there's nothing else I care about, except your good opinion—and Rhoda's, if she gives it to me."

"I am sure that she will."

VICKY RELENTS

"It doesn't matter if she doesn't!" said the old Vivien. "I shall do without it. But yours I must have, Paul, because I've tried to do the square thing by you ever since . . ." she hesitated.

"Ever since what?" The affection in his voice reassured her and she flashed out:

"Ever since you took French leave."

CHAPTER XXXV

VICKY RELENTS

To go back a little, the only caller admitted at Cowley Street on the day of their arrival was Vicky. John St. Barbe had gone down to Southampton with Lord Lyonesse to meet them.

"I shan't go to the house with you," he said, when they got to London. "My housekeeper, who lives in it far more than I do, can tell you where to find things better than I can."

He said this not from laziness, but because he judged that they would rather be alone.

Lord Lyonesse, when he had motored them from Waterloo to the house, went off to try and win over his wife with accounts of the children, with whom he was enraptured—dear little mites, with their father's arrestive dark eyes. The lady-hospital-nurse had swept them off to bed before Vicky arrived.

A bell rang. The footman announced: "Miss Wentworth."

Through all her correspondence Vicky had maintained her disapproval of the elopement. To Rhoda she had not written once. To Paul she never mentioned domestic affairs, but wrote questions about Italy and comments on the political horizon in England.

But now, when she came in and saw how innocent and wholesome and lovely her sister-in-law looked, she knew at a glance that she had been quite mistaken, that Rhoda, in spite of what she had done, was as good a woman as she was herself. She did not kiss her, because she never had kissed her before the catastrophe, but she gave her

PAUL'S WIFE

a whole-hearted welcome, and then flew to Paul and buried herself in his arms, so delighted was she at being able to accept Rhoda.

While this was going on, Rhoda left the room and went up to see if her children had all they needed. She judged that Paul and Vicky should be left to take their new levels.

When she had gone, Vicky said, "I've forgiven you, Paul, because you can't look at Rhoda without knowing that all's well. It has taken me the three years to get over your doing such a dreadful thing, but I haven't reproached you, have I?"

"No, I don't think you have."

"You know, I promised never to think any worse of you whatever I heard. It was a pretty hard job sometimes, after hearing what Lady Lyonesse had to say about your stealing her ewe-lamb. But since I had promised, I took it for granted that you had some excuse beyond the paltry one that you would have lost her for ever unless you had taken French leave, which was the only one you advanced in your letters. Why didn't you tell me plank out that you were necessary to each other's lives? I saw it to-night the moment I set eyes on you. You are twice the man that you were before you went away, for you have added the human element to the dry bones of greatness, and your Rhoda, who was only a political beauty when she left, is now the most lovable creature I ever saw. It is a pity that you didn't put something of this into your letters."

"You did not give me a chance, Vicky. You snubbed me so by writing copybook letters which discouraged all domestic confidences, that I could not be natural."

"But you weren't natural to start with, Paul. I say it again, that excuse really was too paltry."

"But it was the truth. You ask Rhoda if it wasn't. She may be able to bring it home to you."

"Well, I will. Only I must say again that if you could have depicted her, as she is, in your letters, I am sure that I should have come out to visit you."

"If you'd given me the least encouragement, I should have."

VICKY RELENTS

"And I, of course, couldn't, until the lead came from you. Oh, Paul, my hero, I *am* glad to have you back again, with my doubts at rest, and about to resume your work in the world, your place in the battle. You know what you were to me all your life until that fatal night. Think what it must have meant to me to do without you three whole years!"

"I'm glad you missed me, Vicky."

"I did indeed! And the boys—what are they like? Are they like you?"

"Rhoda says so. You'd better go and see for yourself. You'll find them right over this room—that is to say, the day-nursery is, and the night-nursery leads out of it."

Vicky flew upstairs and knocked at the door. It was a very gentle "Come in."

"I've come to see the boys, Rhoda."

"May I say you can't until they're asleep? They're in the throes of going to sleep now, and the day has made them rather excited. Nurse will come out when they're off, and then we can go in to see them. They don't wake easily when they're once off."

"I am glad to see that they have a strict mamma as well as such a very lovely one."

"That means that I am forgiven!"

"I can't help forgiving you, for you're just the wife I should have pictured for Paul. And Vivien, though I am really fond of her, was often a terrible trial. But may I clear up one point, Rhoda? You know what a literal person I am."

Rhoda winced; she seemed to think that something unkind was coming.

Vicky saw her wince, and said, "I'm not going to hurt you, dear. I only want you to arbitrate between Paul and myself on an issue arising from our correspondence."

Rhoda beamed again. She wanted Vicky, whose characterfulness she had admired from the time that she began to know her, for her very own, and she saw that Vicky was going to judge her not from the Church's point of view, but from the point of whether she had made good for such exceptional behaviour.

PAUL'S WIFE

"What is this issue which troubles you, Vicky?" she asked.

"You must excuse my being a little crude in stating it, Rhoda."

Rhoda nodded. She had her sister-in-law's assurance that she did not mean to be unkind.

"The only excuse that Paul ever advanced for running away with you, is that he would have lost you if he hadn't. I say that since he had no right to you, this isn't any excuse at all. Of course, I know that they were going to take you to Java, and that he would have lost you for many months; but people like your parents were not going to spend the rest of their lives in Java, or in any way to permanently exile themselves from London. And, in any case, if you were in love with each other, it was the best thing that could happen for both your sakes."

"But there was much more in it than that, Vicky. Paul wouldn't have come for that. I told him and he knew that I meant it, for I gave him the password *Mizpah*, which was our code-word for 'take this literally'—I told him that if he did not take me away, to prevent them carrying me off in the yacht, I would kill myself. I had bought the poison."

"Oh, you wicked girl!" cried Vicky, horror-struck into conventionality. "I don't wonder that Paul did a thing so unlike himself!" Then, seeing how hurt Rhoda was, in spite of her assurance, she added very quickly, "But I *am* glad that he did it because it would be terrible to think of anything so sweet and beautiful as you are going out of the earth."

"You think I was worth it?"

"Nothing that has happened to me in my whole life has made me so glad as to think that you are my brother's wife, that Paul, whose married life was a bed of thorns, has, like St. Francis in the miracle, found it transformed into a bed of roses."

"We had a picture of that miracle by Filippino Lippi at Lyonesse House."

"That's what put it into my mind," said Vicky, noticing that Rhoda said "had," not "have," as if Lyonesse House belonged to her past.

VICKY RELENTS

"And you're quite sure that you have forgiven me for being so . . . wicked?"

"Of course, I wish that your marriage with Paul could have been managed otherwise. But I am afraid that I am beginning to see degrees in wickedness. You and Paul were not wicked like Vivien and poor Freddy."

Rhoda gave a little deprecating smile. It was a strange *galère* for a woman, who held such opinions as Vicky did, to be in.

"I know that it's very wrong to do what I'm going to do—to compound a felony because it has been successful, to approve of what you have done because I happen to love you both. It is dead against my principles. I don't hold with the modern talk, which they bandied at your Liberal parties, about everyone's having a right to happiness, and yet I have no doubt about you and Paul having the right—and I'm veering round in the most dastardly way to that text about it being hard for the ass to kick against the pricks. I feel as if I were the ass. Oh, Rhoda, what nonsense I'm talking! And you're responsible, because you've upset all my ideas with your ridiculous happiness and innocence."

Just as Rhoda was beginning a blushing confession of how she was touched by what Vicky was saying, the hospital nurse came in to say that the children were asleep.

"Miss Paley," said Rhoda, "this is my husband's sister, Miss Wentworth. Are your charges fast enough asleep for her to see them?"

"Quite," she replied, wondering why Paul should have such a smart and pretty sister, and not conscious of the much more wonderful phenomenon which was before her eyes—that of the wife of the great Australian Prime Minister, the heiress to the vast estates and immemorial pedigree of the St. Ives', bursting with gratitude for the friendship and forgiveness of the ex-governess of the "Money" Moretons. What greater tribute to the power of Mrs. Grundy could there be?

As she saw Paul's boys sleeping in their cots—not Angles, but angels—Vicky was thankful that she had had the strength to let her heart triumph over her conscience,

PAUL'S WIFE

for she knew what a difference it was going to make in her life, having Paul's wife and children to love. She thought that if he would follow her in this, she might even marry David Shand. When the sisters-in-law came down from the nursery, Paul knew that peace had been signed. Vicky's attitude on the question threw her much into the society of Lord Lyonesse. To treat her as a daughter and be accompanied by her as a daughter when Lady Lyonesse was obdurate, solved various minor difficulties. And he was not fonder of her society than his wife was. Lady Lyonesse had much greater sympathy for the one sheep which did not stray than for the one sinner which repented. She wished sinners to keep their distance, and regarded repentance as an unfair claim on her sympathies. At the solicitation of both, Vicky began a visit, which was not likely to end soon, at Lyonesse House, taking the place in the ménage which Rhoda had vacated. The whole household felt the effect of the return of youth, of the presence of a pretty girl, so nearly connected with the family. She was, of course, asked everywhere with them, and thus was present at the historical party at the St. Barbes'.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE TRIUMPH OF PAUL

THE day after Vivien's letter had appeared in the evening papers, Lady Lyonesse went to call upon Paul at Catesby House and asked to see him alone. He received her with a politician's cordiality. Though she had hurt Rhoda cruelly in private, she had supported him loyally in public. When they had shaken hands, he waited for her to proceed. He was a skilled parliamentary tactician.

"Paul," she blurted out, "I believe that I've been unjust to you." He agreed with her, but waited for her to explain. She proceeded, "I did not know that Vivien had justified you in leaving her. But I think you might have chosen a more considerate way of doing it."

"You gave me no time, Lady Lyonesse. In another twenty-four hours you would have had Rhoda out of the

THE TRIUMPH OF PAUL

country, in another direction, lost to me for long months, if not for ever."

"You might have told me about your wife."

"It wouldn't have been very decent, and only barely legal." As a politician and a K.C., he did not think it necessary to add that he was unaware of the fact. Since Lady Lyonesse imagined herself to be in the wrong, it was best to let sleeping dogs lie.

* * * * *

A meatless banquet was in progress at John St. Barbe's old house at Richmond. The company invited to test the cook's ingenuity in fish and eggs, and the fruits of the earth out of their due season, made up for the absence of fleshpots, for the men were of John St. Barbe's kidney, men trusted by the rank and file Conservative M.P.'s, men whose ancestors had served in the councils and armies of England as long as there had been Parliaments. If Lord Lyonesse's political antecedents hardly entitled him to be there, the head of the Norman family of St. Ives had a warrior ancestry which would compare with any of them, and Lady Lyonesse's Fenwick forefathers had been hereditary fighters against the Scot. They were asked, not on their own merits, but out of compliment to Paul Wentworth, whom the guests were assembled to honour, because the War Party in the House of Commons, Conservatives and Liberals alike, felt that it was due to Paul's platform assaults upon the Press Censor that the "Ostrich" régime was overthrown and Mr. Lloyd George, the *Vox Populi Vox Dei*, had been entrusted with the keys of office.

Rhoda was the recipient of profound sympathy, both as an enemy leader who had joined their ranks, and as one who had made a similar sacrifice to beautify the home of the man whom they felt to be their standard-bearer in the fight for the existence of England. To which were added youth, beauty and extraordinary *simpatica*. The only person in the room who was not fired with chivalrousness for her was that stark Northumbrian, her mother; the only person in the room who did not belong to the ancient Chivalry of England was her

PAUL'S WIFE

husband, the Melbourne board-school boy, to whom that proud Chivalry to-day looked for leadership.

He led the way when the men came up to join the ladies after dinner, since it was in his honour—a tall, slab-sided Colonial, with a face burned and a beard bleached by the sun, and a sweeping and commanding eye. As markedly one of the people as everyone else in the room was a person of breeding was the man for whom Rhoda St. Ives, heir to a peerage and one of the greatest fortunes in England, had sacrificed her honour. Yet there was only one person in that assemblage who would have cast a stone at her for it.

“You must be very proud of your husband, Roe,” said John St. Barbe, who had gone straight to her when he entered the room.

“Proud, yes, Cousin John! I am consumed with exultation at having listened to my heart. And I owe my happiness almost as much to you as I do to my husband. It was your standing by us at the critical moment which made people ‘know’ me.”

“It did not cost me nothing, Roe, because it was flat in the face of the principles which I had always cherished. But I felt that I owed it to England to support your husband in the way he needed most.”

While John St. Barbe was talking to Rhoda, Lady Lyonesse had taken the opportunity to get a word with her son-in-law. They met as friends now, though she had not really forgiven him for carrying off Rhoda, or he really forgiven her for her hostility to the marriage.

“Well, Paul! what’s going to happen with the new Prime Minister?” she asked. Paul, as the platform mouthpiece of the muzzled Press, was credited with knowing as much of the new programme as anyone in the country.

“Well, at last we’ve got a man to speak for the country as Hindenburg speaks for Germany, a man who can act on the spur of a crisis—I can tell you that. And the war will be waged with a will. We are using our Napoleon.”

“Yes, I know that, but what new measures will he take to stop the rot?—I’m not talking slang.”

THE TRIUMPH OF PAUL

"Well, we shall have a real War Council; he won't mind my telling you that. The war is not going to be run any longer by a score of Departmental heads, who only seemed to think about it when they had nothing left to tie up with red tape. It will be a super-Cabinet of five or six men, mostly without portfolios, I think, who are to give all their time to the war."

"You ought to be one of them, Paul. Though I shall never forgive you, I know that you are one of the few men who could be trusted not to give a thought to anything but your country."

"And do you really think that of me, Lady Lyonesse? I thought I was a thief and a robber!"

"Only to us, Paul—only to me, I mean, for John has made you a present of the treasure which you stole from him."

"Are you ever going to forgive me?"

"I can't conceive anything that would make me."

There was a ring at the front-door bell. The St. Barbes were too old-fashioned to have their hanging bells ousted by electricity; their front-door bell was a tocsin.

"That can't be anybody's car yet," said Mrs. St. Barbe, tentatively, to her husband.

"I hope not. Who is it?" he asked the footman, who approached him with a card on the tray.

"A gentleman who wishes to speak to Lord Lyonesse, sir."

John St. Barbe glanced at the card; on it was engraved "Mr. Miles Willoughby."

"Willoughby is a King's messenger," said the host to his wife, adding to the footman, "Ask Mr. Willoughby whether he won't join us."

"Yes, sir."

The footman returned alone. "Mr. Willoughby asked if he may see Lord Lyonesse in the library, sir."

"Certainly. Please tell his Lordship."

Lord Lyonesse was away some minutes. When he came back, he was waving a large blue envelope, with the seals broken. He went straight up to his wife and Paul Wentworth. "It is about you, Paul," he said.

Paul raised his eyebrows.

PAUL'S WIFE

"It is from the Prime Minister. He wishes me to ascertain if you will accept a seat without a portfolio on the War Council, to represent the Britains beyond the Seas."

"It's too late for me to offer my forgiveness now, Paul," sighed Lady Lyonesse. "Why am I always a day behind the fair?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"I suppose it will be something horrid, but tell away."

"Because you are not a time-server."

"Is that why I would not forgive you?"

"I am sure it is."

"Do you really think that, Paul?"

"I do."

"But I should be a time-server if I forgave you now."

"Be a time-server for once to please Rhoda."

"Shall I be forgiven if I tell the truth?"

"What is the truth?"

"That I am so prostrated by your being a member of the War Council."

"But I haven't accepted yet."

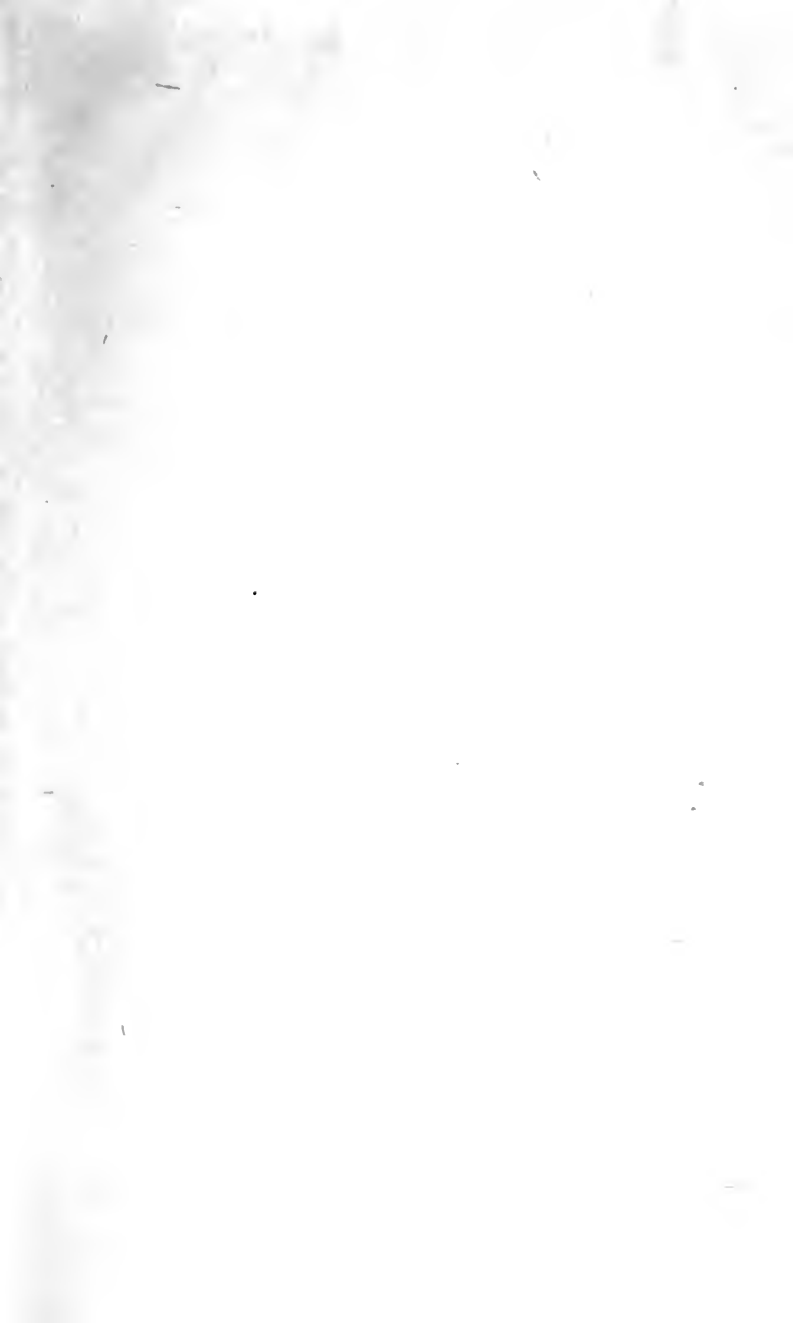
"No, you haven't," said Lord Lyonesse. "What shall I tell Willoughby? I think he's waiting."

"There can only be one answer," said Paul. "I have always been a thorough Lloyd-Georgeite."

"And what is my answer, Paul?" asked Lady Lyonesse, with shamefaced affection.

"Go and tell Rhoda that you and I are friends again, and how much she'll have to depend on you. My days will often start with political breakfasts, and I may only get home in time to be waked in the morning."

THE END



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

ORIGINAL APRIL '88
LD REC'D 10/1/88
SEP 20 1988
SEP 20 1988

-88



3 1158 01295 3559

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 375 588 1

